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ABSTRACT

Drawing on a parent's perspective, this booklet presents tools, strategies, and information a parent will need to ensure their child will get the best education possible. The book's chapters are as follows: (1) "Organizing Your Home for Success," including teaching the child to be organized and what to do to promote learning at home; (2) "Understanding Your Child as a Learner," on learning styles and appropriate psychological, sociological, environmental, emotional, physiological, and perceptual strategies; (3) "Communicating with Your School," including strategies for effective two-way communication and for different types of parent-teacher conferences; (4) "Finding the Right School," including the process for reviewing the neighborhood school, sample questions for principal and teacher interviews, and checklists for school visits; and (5) "Supporting Your Child's School," including partnerships in the areas of parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, making decisions, and collaborating with the community. The book's appendix includes activities, resources, and additional checklists. A glossary of educational terms and reproducible templates conclude the book. (HTH)

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Crosswalk Connection

A Parent's Guide to Bridging the Gap Between Home and School

ED 442 577

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By Mary L. Wolf, M.A.O.M.
Veronica Reichardt, M.Ed

About the Authors

Mary Wolf and Roni Reichardt have been improving parent-teacher relationships together since 1996. They began by developing a series of workshops called P.E.P. Talks© (**P**romoting **E**ducational **P**artnerships). These training workshops are geared for parents and teachers, assisting them in establishing, maintaining and evaluating quality partnerships for the sake of children's education. This book is the parent's perspective on that partnership.

Mary Wolf, president of Promoting Educational Partnerships, Inc., has been in education for over 15 years. Her experience includes the regular classroom, gifted classrooms and adult education. She is also an active parent of three school-aged children. After completing her Masters Degree in Organizational Management in 1995, she combined her knowledge of the education system with her business skills and Promoting Educational Partnerships, Inc. was formed. Mary devotes much time to community activities and is currently chairperson of Tempe, Arizona's "Promise - The Alliance for Youth Committee."

Roni Reichardt is the Vice President of Promoting Educational Partnerships, Inc. She has completed her Masters Degree in Educational Psychology while working and teaching for a major employer in the State of Arizona. Roni currently holds the position of Evaluation Coordinator for two Arizona county-wide School-to-Work Partnerships. She is involved in each of the schools in which her three children attend. Roni gives much of her time to community work and actively promotes School-to-Career activities.

CROSSWALK CONNECTION

A Parent's Guide to Bridging the Gap Between Home and School

By Mary L. Wolf M.A.O.M.
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Stephanie Williams for her dedication to the research and experience she brought to the early stages of the process. Her expertise as an involved parent, PTA representative and researcher was invaluable.

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Lisa Barlow, the most organized mom I know, offered the most strategies for Organizing Your Home for Academic Success. Thank you for being the model mom for others to follow.

We sincerely thank all these fine people. We know they are proud of the part they played in the development of "Crosswalk Connection" and the guidance that it gives to parents such as themselves.

Introduction

Upon leaving the teaching profession in 1994, I knew I still wanted to contribute to bettering the education of children everywhere. Thirty years of research supports that parent involvement in children's education increases student achievement. With three small children of my own, I knew I would have a better shot than most parents at making sure they were prepared, supported and advocated for during their years in the public schools because I had been in the system. Why shouldn't all parents have this knowledge? I hooked up with my current business partner and co-author, Roni Reichardt and another very involved parent of older children, Stephanie Williams. The three of us embarked on the task of gathering all the tools, strategies and information a parent would need to ensure their child would get the best education possible.

Starting with parents' perspective, while there were some very comprehensive resources on the bookshelves (some of them are cited at the end of each chapter), we found that the broader perspective of understanding and navigating the education system was missing. Then we explored parent involvement from the teachers' perspective and gathered a considerable amount of information that only educators would understand. Our goal was to build a connection or bridge between the two sides - the home and the school, parents and educators. Inside this guide, you will find practical information, backed by research and our personal experiences, perceptions, and knowledge about successfully getting our children the best education possible.

Based on our final product, we presented workshops to parents, educators and community members who now successfully build other bridges between schools and the community such as civic organizations, businesses, government and municipalities. Thus the title of this book, Crosswalk Connection, symbolizes not only

the parent walking their child from home to school, but also the ability of all those concerned with education to cross the crosswalk to each other to learn about each other and support one another.

There is so much to tell you about your child, their school and your role that this book could be three times this size. What Roni and I finally conceded was that a 150 page guide with all the basic information was better than a 500 page manual that was never opened. This book is meant to be your starting point, your resource guide containing the most important information about what you should be doing with and for your child. It is our sincere hope that you find this book contains practical suggestions and useable tools that will improve your skills as your child's strongest educational support system. Try as many as you wish and keep what works. You'll find that both you and your child will be so much happier with the results and your long-term opportunity for success is so much greater. The road may not always be smooth but I guarantee you will be a better bus driver after reading this. We wish you the best.

Mary L. Wolf

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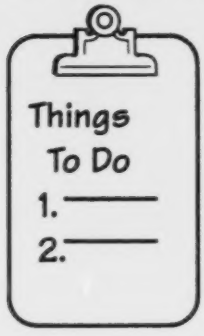
PART ONE:

Organizing Your Home For Success

When my son began preschool I became overwhelmed with the amount of paperwork that was brought home which, of course, included all of his precious projects, pictures and papers! I soon ran out of space to hang his work and began to secretly throw away some of it. Inevitably I was caught one day when he asked me. "Why is my picture in the garbage?" I was mortified and made up some excuse as to how it must have become attached to another sheet of paper by accident. I realized that he needed me to value these pictures as much as he did! With two sisters not far behind him in school, I devised a system for organizing schoolwork that has allowed me to honor and keep tract of their work while keeping my house clutter-free.

Why Organize?

While parent involvement in education gains momentum both nationally and locally, busy parents of today need to make some decisions about what they can do to contribute to their childrens' success in school. Is their effort from home only? Does the schedule allow time to volunteer in the classroom or other areas of the school? Extensive research finds that an organized, supportive home environment far exceeds school involvement as the most important influence on academic performance, (Wang et.al. 1993).



Teachers are sometimes concerned and distressed by some students' inability to get communications home to their parents or to get forms signed and returned to the teacher in a timely manner. While this may seem like a very simple task, it can be overwhelming for a child whose backpack is stuffed with papers, whose parents work odd hours or whose schedule and routines vary from day to day. One of the most important skills you can give your child is the ability to follow through on a task no matter how simple or menial it may seem.

It is best to begin establishing your routines early in the child's educational career. In fact, student achievement was found to be higher in homes where regular routines and accountability are present from an early age. As children get older they will resist changes to an already embedded routine. Not only that but dysfunctional behaviors are difficult to undo. Don't get discouraged. The results of your efforts will show no matter what the age of your student.

How Do You Set Up Your Home?

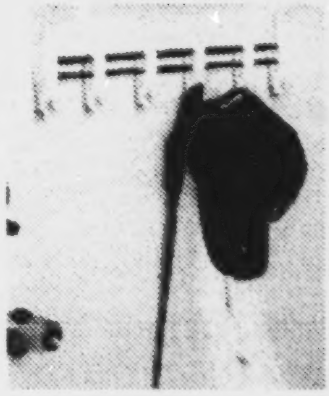
Just as you did when your baby was born, when your "baby" goes off to school, you will need to rearrange your home. Adding some furniture and restricting certain environmental distractions is the beginning of organizing your home for academic success. Have your child join you as you make, purchase, gather and/or place the important elements of an organized home.

The Out Bin

This may be an area, table, counter top or other surface where children can place the things that need to go to school with them the following day. If your child uses a backpack these may be things that don't fit in it or that are not yet in it. This space should be easily within view of their primary exit from which they leave to go to school.

Backpack Hooks

Is your child coming in the house after school, dropping her backpack at the door and heading for the refrigerator? **These hooks are just what you need**. They may be in the back hallway, inside the back door, in an entryway closet or in a child's room. They serve as the backpack's home when the child is not using it. There should be at least two or three as coats and sweatshirts may also need an easily accessible home.



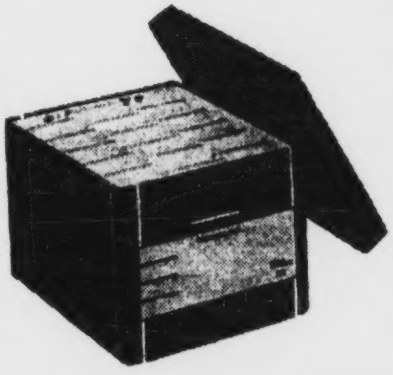
Cubbies

These storage areas, which are used regularly in many classrooms, are just as valuable at home. They provide a space where children can put all the papers, small projects and artwork they have done in school. They are evidence of learning so some of it you will want to preserve as evidence of the level of growth you have seen in your child through the years.

Don't get caught throwing away your child's learning artifacts!

These cubbies should only be used for **short term storage**. This could mean anywhere from one to two months worth of accumulated learning artifacts.

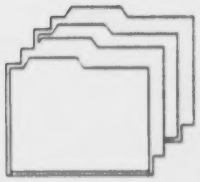
Cardboard Keeper Drawers



Long term storage for real evidence of learning

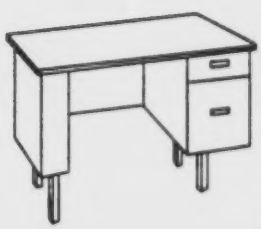
When you are ready to purge the cubbies, let your child decide what they want to keep because they are proud of what they have done. Now that enough time has passed since they actually did the work, children are more likely to part with routine artifacts such as worksheets and see value in the difficult projects. For long-term storage use **cardboard drawers** or an old trunk.

Student Portfolios



These portfolios can be made from accordion files or a large folder with slots. As a parent you will want to use this to save some of the more obvious pieces of evidence of learning that will demonstrate to school officials what your child knows and can do in specific curriculum areas such as math, writing, and reading. Other areas of the curriculum, such as social studies, science and art, for example, may also be represented in this portfolio. Should you ever move to a new school district or if your child's learning needs are either over or under- estimated by the teacher, you can use these pieces of evidence to support your concerns. You should have a formal system for keeping track of their learning in any case. **Understanding Your Child as a Learner by P.E.P. Consulting** will help you not only know your child's learning style but give you strategies for keeping track of their learning. (See Part Two Page 25)

Designated Homework Area



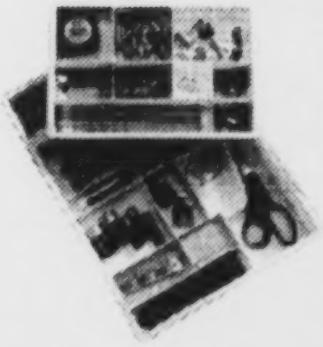
This is one of the most crucial elements of organizing your home. Children need to know **where** they can and should do their homework. The **when** will be addressed later when schedules are discussed. Knowing your child's learning style will help you to know what parameters you can offer him/her for making this choice. Allow your child to decide the best space for doing homework. If your child's choice turns out to be a poor one because performance was unacceptable, then you may want to re-evaluate the decision. This space should have a "homework survival kit" available at all times. Make sure it is well stocked but put your child in charge of letting you know when he/she is short or out of any item. What to store in the **Homework Survival Kit** as well as strategies for productive homework times are covered on page 15.

Parent Information Spot

Children will come home at least once a week with written communications from the teacher or school. Have a place that is clearly designated for placement of these communications. It may be a kitchen counter, end table or even your pillow if you find that your schedule and your child's schedule are on opposite ends of the day. You can't miss something placed on your pillow.

You may want your child to use Post-It ™ notes to cue you in to papers that need a signature such as permission slips.

Don't Keep "Saving" Your Child



An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Teach your child to be organized and self-disciplined from the day he/she walks out the door for kindergarten. Model the the best organizational techniques and let your child stumble, if need be, without saving him/her. Remember the lesson is his/hers to be learned.

For example, lay down the ground rules:

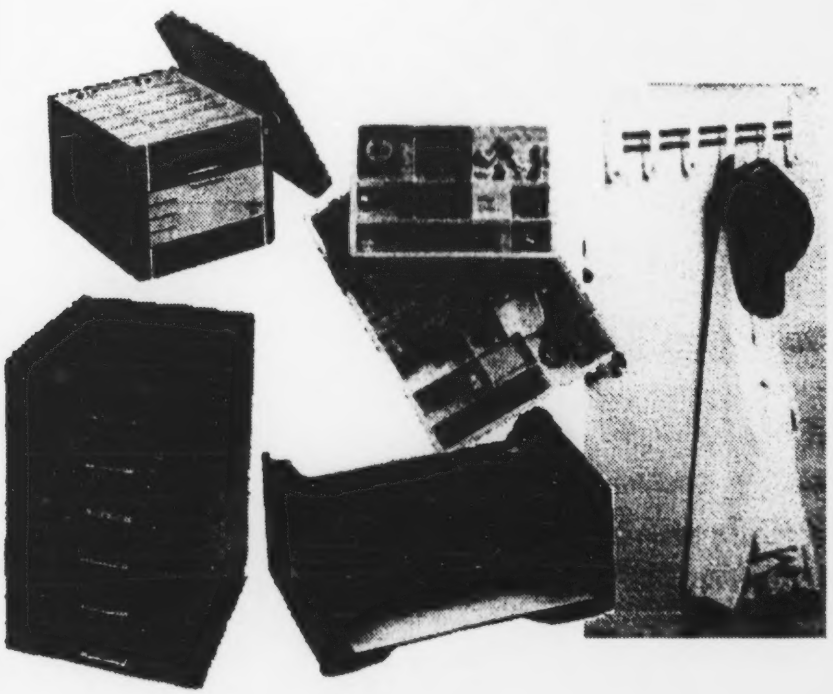
"If you forget your lunch, I will bring it to you **ONE TIME**. After that you will have to eat whatever the cafeteria offers to those who forget."

"I will bring your homework to school when you have forgotten it **THIS ONE TIME ONLY**. If you forget again, you will have to live with the consequences the teacher decides upon."

Ask your child's teacher for strategies if you have a "repeat offender".

What I Need To Do To Set Up My Home

- ☐ Get or establish the OUT bin.
- ☐ Put up some backpack hooks.
- ☐ Buy or make cubbies.
- ☐ Make or buy cardboard keeper drawers or pull out that old trunk.
- ☐ Begin a student portfolio.
- ☐ Establish a designated homework area.
- ☐ Establish a parent information spot.
- ☐ Stop "saving" your child from learning from his mistakes.



What Should You Do To Promote Learning At Home

The most important support you can give your child is setting up and sticking to the homework routine. This supports the academics at school. But what else can you be doing at home to support educational activities and learning? Here are some suggestions:

Reading Aloud To Your Child and Having Your Child Read Aloud To You

There is nothing like taking **15-30 minutes every day** to listen to your child read to you. Children thrive on this activity because it gives them "cozy time" with parents while practicing an important skill. You may also choose to read aloud to your child which opens opportunities to introduce new vocabulary words. Both of these options reinforce the importance of reading. This has proven to be the most effective means of developing beginning reading skills in children and can be quite noticeable to the kindergarten and first grade teacher when it is absent from their home routine.

Regular **family trips to the public library** and **book stores** (depending upon your budget) should be required of everyone. This helps your child become comfortable with the library system and gives him/her a sense of the importance of literature in our society. Children can get their own library cards when you feel they are old enough. Having one empowers them by making them feel grown up and, of course, encourages responsibility for returning the books.

There are different types of reading that children can do. **Reading for fun** should be done with books, comic books and magazines they find interesting. These materials should be at or below their instructional level (meaning not too challenging) and may be fiction or non-fiction in nature.

Try to be sure they get a balanced diet of **various reading materials.** For example, many series such as Goose Bumps© or Babysitters Club© will be interesting but some teachers refer to these as "candy for the brain". Try to expose your child to good authors. Look for literature that has won awards such as Newberry or Caldecott. Ask the librarian or bookstore clerk for a

list of these award-winning books at your child's reading level.

Give your child an opportunity to **share what they have read** with you by setting up a time to discuss what they have read or provide them with the supplies to do a book celebration that can be shared with the whole family! A list of Book Celebration Activities can be found on page 159 in the Appendix.

Reading for information can also be great fun! If a child expresses an interest in a specific subject, rather than attempt to answer it ourselves as parents, sometimes it is more fun for the child to discover the answer in a book. Even though you may run into some resistance initially because he/she wants the quick answer, allowing your child to look it up supports their independence and natural curiosity.

Strategies For Supporting Reading In Your Home

- Be a role model yourself and be a part of the regular reading routine.
- Read aloud to your children from a variety of types and levels of literature (See Jim Trelease, "Read Aloud Handbook" on page 21 Additional Resources.)
- Look up information in books at home or at the library rather than answering your child's questions yourself.
- Make going to the library a weekly or monthly event.
- Have your child keep a reading log to track all the books he/she has read.
- Have your child do a book celebration, especially during the summer months, and proudly display it in your home. Examples are in the Appendix page 159.
- Encourage your child to read different types of literature:

Mystery	**Science Fiction**	**Humorous**	**Short Story**
Biography	**Autobiography**	**News**	**Magazines**

- Be sure lighting is sufficient. Put a reading lamp next to their bed or favorite reading space.
- Encourage your child to write books of all kinds for fun. Provide material for illustrations and covers. Read them together with your child.

Computer Software

You may choose to have **encyclopedias** in the house but these become outdated quickly. If you have a computer at home with a CD-Rom, look for software such as Microsoft's **Encarta**™. Software can be used to enhance any child's learning but is particularly successful with kinesthetic learners. Beware, however, as there are some exceptional and some worthless software on the market. It can be very difficult to distinguish between them by looking at the box in which they are packaged. A list of **recommended software programs** for children across all grades and subjects can be found on pages 160-164 in the Appendix.

The Internet

You may want to allow your child to browse the **Internet** for answers. **Be Cautious!** Sit down with your child when they are researching on the Internet in their younger years until you feel comfortable that they understand its proper use.

Hire A Tutor

If you feel the classroom environment is not meeting your child's educational needs in one or two subject areas, you may want to consider hiring a tutor. This person may be part of a professional learning center or a former or current teacher working independently.

Strategies For Hiring A Tutor

- Establish the exact outcome you would like the tutor to achieve.
- Get a list of tutors from your district office or get a recommendation from a parent, teacher or principal you trust and who knows your child.
- Ask to see their current certification. Look for endorsements in special subject areas such as reading or gifted education.
- If appropriate, have them speak with your child's classroom teacher for background information.
- Ask other parents you trust about their experiences with tutoring.
- Interview them; feel comfortable with them. Ask the tutor:

How will you know what my child knows in this subject?
How will you address what they don't know? Why will you take this approach?

Give Your Child Time To Reflect

With the busy schedules our kids follow every day, it is a wonder that they can even think at the end of the day. All children need down time to reflect on what they have learned. Allow them quiet time away from distractions and activities to process information they have taken in that day.

Present opportunities to explore, discover and play by allowing them spaces and places to learn through discovery. This could include anything from taking them to the local museum or science center to playing board games or making forts at home.

Monitor the screen time so children can learn moderation when watching TV or playing games on the computer. Children should learn early what productive television is versus non-productive or entertainment-based TV. Watch their shows with them, especially the first time and share your thoughts.

Communicate High Expectations

It's important that you let your child know from the beginning that you expect great things from him and he can do anything if he puts his mind to it. This should be reflected in his learning and his behavior. If he is not working up to his academic potential, perhaps a gentle nudge or one-on-one assistance would be helpful. If you find he is behaving in an unacceptable manner either in school or outside of school, **set the boundaries** along **with consequences** and **HOLD HIM TO IT**.

All children need boundaries, some more than others. If you set those boundaries out too far you may find them wandering into unpleasant territories, especially in the middle school or junior high school years. Subtle is sometimes better, so set the examples and habits that support your expectations rather than being pushy or over-involved in your pursuit.

Support Your Child's Participation In Enrichment Programs

Children, even adults, need to feel that they belong to a social group. Lacking this basic need, children will find it in less desirable places. It is one of the reasons that children turn to gangs and dysfunctional friendships. Parents need to offer opportunities for their child to be engaged in activities or social groups within their church, community sports program, music program or others. Find your child's gift or passion and support it.

Here are some ideas for starting your children on **extra-curricular activities** to keep them engaged: **Sports** programs begin as early as 5 years of age. While this is a very popular means of getting your child involved, be sensitive to the child who neither likes or thrives on physical competition, or who clearly appears to be disengaged from the activity. Some children do not have the physical aptitude or ability despite a desire on the parents' part to have their child succeed in sports.

On the other hand, the child who may not appear to have much aptitude but who is having a great time should be encouraged to continue. This may present itself as a wonderful opportunity to support your child's desire to participate in a challenging activity and demonstrate persistence. A gift like that will carry over into other areas of your child's life.

Research shows a strong correlation between success in music and success in math in students. **Music programs** vary around the country but if your child shows an aptitude for music you may want to begin formal instruction with piano lessons around the 1st grade. While some children start earlier, it is important that you find a piano teacher who has training in teaching piano

to young children. See **Will Piano Lessons Make My Child Smarter** on page 165 in the Appendix.

These types of extra-curricular activities provide an opportunity for children to demonstrate persistence and to better themselves even when milestone successes are few and far between. A **consistent schedule for practicing** any activity will promote self-awareness, self-confidence and structure. Attributes such as these will last a lifetime.

While it is not encouraged to keep your child in activities that are not enjoyable to them, it is also not a good idea to allow your child to quit too soon or too often. Make the decision together to pick one or two potentially successful, enjoyable activities and stay with it for at least a year or through the season. At that point it would be a good time to re-evaluate whether or not your child wants to continue. Call your city for a **list of organizations** that offer these activities in your community.

Types Of Extra Curricular Activities

- Fine Arts Instruction
- Performing Arts - Dance, Theatre
- Musical Instruction - Instrumental, Vocal
- Academic Enrichment Programs
- Learning Centers - Tutoring
- Children's Centers, Museums, Tours
- Sports and Recreation Services
- Youth Groups and Clubs
- Educational and Cultural Day Camps
- Scouting

Resource: Parents Guide Resource Book - 1999-2000

What I Will Need To Do To Support Learning At Home

- ☐ Read to my child every day for at least 15 minutes.
- ☐ Listen to my child read to me every day for at least 15 minutes.
- ☐ Investigate computer software programs.
- ☐ Hire a tutor for my child.
- ☐ Give my child time to reflect every day.
- ☐ Communicate high expectations to my child.
- ☐ Make sure my child is involved in at least one extra-curricular activity.

How Do You Establish Positive Routines?

Establishing and maintaining regular routines and schedules is necessary to keep your child on track. Whether you have one child or ten children, keeping them organized takes a tremendous amount of effort. Structure your schedules and conduct supportive activities to be sure your child takes responsibility for his/her own actions. The earlier you have your child take charge, the easier your work as a parent will be.

The Homework Routine

Why do you care about homework? "Parent motivation and support are the most important factors in determining whether a child will do well in school...The successful students all seem to have parents whose attitudes show they care about education by...letting their children know that their education is a priority in their family...And homework is a part of that priority". (Canter, 1987)

Here are the strategies for a successful homework encounter. If you need further assistance, please see the bibliography for books on the subject.

Homework Strategies

- Make it clear from the start that homework is a serious business. Your child is expected to complete it just as you as a parent complete your work.
- Express an interest in the assignments.
- Never do your child's homework for him/her.
- Choose a location that is free from what the child perceives to be distractions.
- Choose a time that works best for you and your child and place it on a weekly calendar.
- Praise your child's efforts often and honestly.
- Contact the child's teacher immediately if you feel there is a problem.

Your child should be getting a well rounded **variety of assignments** from the teacher(s). Make sure that the homework does not look the same every day and that it is taking an **appropriate amount of time**. Here are some guidelines for this:

Types of Homework

- **Practice home work** - to reinforce information through practice.
- **Preparation homework** - includes reading a book or researching information prior to whole class discussions or units.
- **Extension homework** - is a way to challenge students to broaden their understanding of what has been learned in class by comparing and/or contrasting it to other situations.
- **Creative homework** - is usually lots of fun because it allows children to produce and share an extension, integration or application of what they've learned in the form of a creative project.

Grade Level Time Allotments

Grades 1-3	10-45 min/day	1-3 assignments per week
Grades 4-6	45-90 min/day	2-4 assignments per week
Grades 7-9	1-2 hours/day	3-4 assignments per week
Grades 10-12	1.5-2.5 hours/day	4-5 assignments per week

Homework Survival Kit (HSK)

pencils	pencil sharpener	glue stick	tape
thesaurus	stapler	scissors	paper clips
dictionary	construction paper	writing paper	eraser
colored pencils	markers	atlas	crayons

(Forms for replacing items in the HSK are found in the Template section)

Schedules

There are some parents who spend the better part of their day carpooling their children from one activity to another. The most successful of these parents almost always has an organized system to keep track of the months, weeks and even each day's events. It is highly recommended that you explore different types of calendars and notebooks until you find the ones that work for you. The two most commonly used systems in the workforce are Franklin™ and Daytimer™ but you may find others that are set up more to your liking.

The family calendar is the one with everyone's events on it so you have a clear idea of any overlaps. This will probably be a **monthly calendar** such as those you find at any office supply store. The **weekly calendar** should have all of the regular activities listed on it such as piano lessons, soccer practice or karate. An example of a weekly calendar can be found in the Appendix page 166 and a template for you to copy on page 188. The **daily calendar** may be a **white board** or **black board** that can easily be changed every day to reflect the important events of that day.

Other Strategies For Keeping Up With The Schedules Of Today's Children

- Use the **white board** to celebrate accomplishments, birthdays, special events.
- Keep stickynotes (Post-It™ notes) in an accessible place for making quick notes to yourself or to your child.
- Make it part of your routine to check out your child's backpack at least once a month in search of lost or forgotten objects, papers, and/or (yuk!) food.

Have Regular Family Meetings

Your family should have a Family Meeting at least once a week. This will give you all time to reflect on the week past and the week to come and deal with issues such as behavior, rules, allowance, etc. Usually these take place on Sunday evening but, of course, it should be scheduled when everyone can be there. Give the children as much opportunity as possible to be an integral part of every meeting by contributing to or making up the agenda and facilitating or running the meeting.

Strategies For Family Meetings

1. Establish a weekly meeting time - no cancellations or interruptions.
2. Have an agenda for each meeting. Let children contribute to agenda topics.
3. Strive for consensus decisions rather than a majority vote. If no consensus is reached, table the decision and have a cooling-off period. Revisit at next meeting.
4. Meetings should include a review of the next week's schedule.
5. Include planning of a family fun activity for the week.
6. End the meeting by playing a game or serving dessert.
7. Avoid meetings combined with a meal and conduct at a cleared-off table.

Sample Agenda For Family Meeting

AGENDA

• Family recognition/gratitude	6:30-6:35
• Review of weekly schedule	6:35-6:45
• Problem-solving	6:45-7:00
Chores	
School work	
• Brainstorm family fun activities that are free	7:00-7:10
• Brainstorm family fun activities that cost money	7:10-7:20
• Round Robin Compliments and Closure	7:20-7:30

Source: Positive Discipline, Jane Nelsen, Ed.D.

(A template for meeting agenda can be found on page 189)

Engage Your Child In Productive Conversations About School

Take advantage of the moments you and your child spend together and share the decision-making, problem solving and celebrations related to the school day. Studies show that "students whose parents converse regularly with them about school experiences perform better academically than children who rarely discuss school with their parents." (Astone and McLanahan 1991, Ho and Williams 1996, Finn, 1993).

These conversations, however, can be difficult with the child whose answer is always "fine" or the child who goes on and on about recess but completely forgets what went on during math. While there are clues even within these answers for parents to catch, productive conversations are ones where there is no guessing. See **Strategies For What to Ask About School** (page 19).

Try to be open minded when hearing answers from your child. Allow the child to discuss the successes as well as difficulties. Be supportive and encouraging, not judgmental and dictatorial. Many times parents are quick to answer and solve academic, emotional and social issues children find frustrating about school. When problems arise, give your child the opportunity to solve them by asking him/her questions rather than trying to fix it on the spot.

Strategies For WHAT To Ask About School

- Show me something you learned in math (reading or writing) today.
- How do you feel about your teacher?
- What was your favorite part of the day today? Why?
- Why do you think your teacher gave you this assignment?
- Why? How? Who? They are your best openers.

WHEN To Ask About School

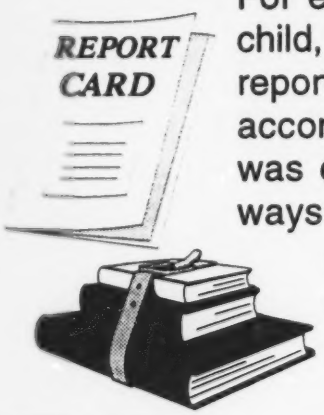
- During a family meal.
- Right after school while it's still fresh. Children usually will dump more about school right after they get home than later in the day when they have put it all behind them.
- Before they go to bed when their minds are clearing out the day.
- In the morning before they leave for school as they think about the day ahead.

Be In Partnership With Your Child

Students also thrive when parents and children are partners in making important decisions. Such decisions may include what teacher to request for the following year, what projects to do and, in later years, what classes to take. Consult with your child before making decisions that directly effect his schooling such as which tutor to hire, which teacher to request or even which school to attend.

Even though you may be the final decision-maker for these issues, asking for your child's input sends the message that their opinion is important. As your child becomes the final decision-maker on other issues, your hope will be that he consults with you just as you have been consulting with him. This type of engagement and interest in your child's studies is a primary building block for academic success.

Emphasize The Process As Well As The Product



For every learning artifact you collect from your child, whether it be a written report, art project or report card, ask yourself and your child how he accomplished this. If the straight A report card was easy to achieve, you may want to discuss ways of challenging your child to more difficult material with his teachers. If the C was a lot of work to accomplish, celebrate that process.

All children need and want to be challenged, but that may look very different for every child. The more familiar you are with the nature of the processes employed by your child to get the end product, the more successful both you and your child will feel.

What I Will Need To Do To Establish And Support Regular Routines

- ☐ Establish regular homework routines.
- ☐ Make a homework survival kit.
- ☐ Organize the schedules so nobody misses anything.
- ☐ Have regular family meetings.
- ☐ Ask your child about school every day.
- ☐ Share in the partnership of decision-making.
- ☐ Emphasize the process as well as the product.

Additional Resources

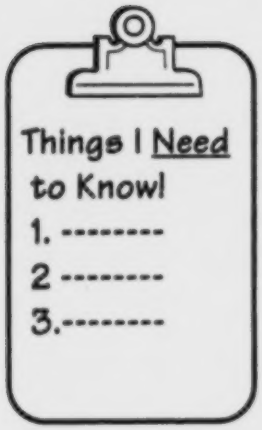
- *Easy Home Tutoring by Adria Renke, Stony Brook Publishing & Productions, Inc., 1995.*
- *The Homework Solution by Linda Agler Sonna, Ph.D., Williamson Publishing Company, 1990.*
- *Homework Without Tears by Lee Canter & Lee Hausner, Ph.D., Harper Collins Publishers, 1998*
- *The New Read Aloud Handbook by Jim Trelease, Penguin Books, 1989.*
- *Making the Best of Schools by Jeannie Oakes, & Martin Lipton, Vail-Ballou Press, 1990.*

PART TWO:

Understanding Your Child As A Learner

I am ashamed to say that as a teacher, there were times when I did not understand the importance of knowing a child's learning style. Being a very auditory person (I like to learn by hearing and discussing), I remember becoming frustrated with one particular student. He never seemed to be paying attention when I gave directions! I would tell the class what to do, have them repeat it back in different words and finally I would ask, "Does everyone understand?" Undoubtedly, this student would raise his hand and say, "I don't get it." Exasperated, I would be forced to go over to him and go through the first couple of problems. Later I came to realize that this child was a very strong visual learner (he learned best by seeing). How sorry I am that I didn't know enough about learning styles to accommodate his style by providing the directions in writing on the overhead or the board. I now know that there are differences and this knowledge has helped to provide input into "what" learning environment best suits children's needs.

Why Do You Need To Know?



The education of children in today's world has become increasingly more confusing. While we continue to see systems and practices that reflect traditional notions, such as nine month school calendars based on our agrarian society, while at the same time we have begun to see systems and practices reflecting new and innovative ideas, such as magnet schools with specific philosophies and specialties. As parents, we are our children's best advocates for a successful education, yet we are poorly prepared to make decisions about our children without a keen comprehensive understanding of them as learners.

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce parents to the same research and theories of learning that teachers are exposed to as well as tools and strategies for keeping track of what your children already know. With this understanding of your children, you will feel better equipped to speak on their behalf, advocate for their needs and set up successful learning environments for them outside of school.

Thirty years of research supports that your involvement in your child's education will produce better test scores, more productive work in school, fewer discipline problems and an overall greater chance for success. The "involvement" covered in this publication will empower you with the terminology and tactics to use when advocating for your child. Be diligent about tracking his learning through products he has brought home. Before you know it, he will be throwing his caps up in the air while you watch with pride knowing you were there every step of the way.

How Do Children Learn?

There has been much brain research over the past two decades that gives us a better idea about how we learn. The following pages will explain the two most common theories related to this research. As we present **Learning Styles** and **Gardner's Multiple Intelligences**, we will offer strategies that you may wish to try on your child either at home or request be implemented at school to enhance his learning. You may want to concentrate only on the ones that you feel apply to your child's learning style strength or you may wish to try some that are clearly not his strengths to introduce him to new ways of absorbing information. There is no telling what will work on your child, so feel free to try many different strategies.

In the Appendix you will find a page for documenting what you have tried called **List of Strategies I Want To Try**. If you are good about documenting whether or not a particular strategy worked for you child, this page may be shared with educators or tutors so they can get a head start on finding learning strategies that work. You will also find a page called **Your Child's Learning Profile**. This may be used to document where your child's strengths and weaknesses are academically, socially and emotionally and what you perceive to be his Learning Style and/or Intelligence area.

The hope is that all children, even those who "march to the beat of a different drummer", will find a place where learning is interesting and exciting. Fostering a love of life long learning begins with understanding what turns us on to the world.

Learning Styles

Knowing your child as a learner enables you to be your child's best educational advocate. Knowing their learning style is key because "students tend to learn and remember better and enjoy learning more when they are taught through their learning style preferences," (Dunn, 1992).

Knowing Your Child's Individual Learning Style Will Help You to:

- Set up appropriate learning style strategies at home making learning more effective.
- Choose the best teacher for your child.
- Choose the best learning environment for your child.
- Communicate with your school and your child's teacher.

What Is A Learning Style

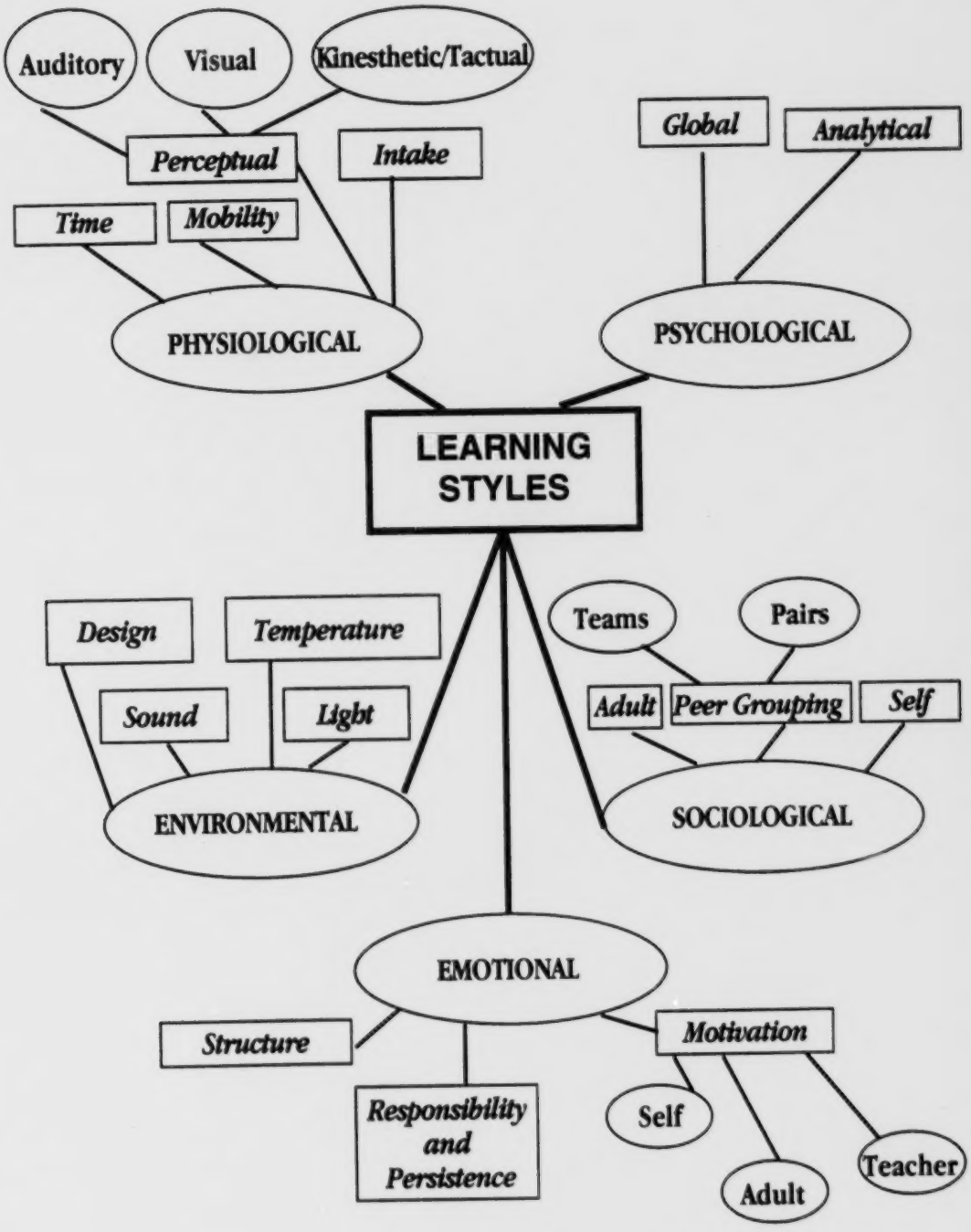
Each child has a particular **learning style** defined as **"the way in which each learner begins to concentrate on, process, absorb, and retain information,"** (Dunn, 1992). The mind map or chart on the following page will show the five categories identified by Dunn along with the subcategories. Do not be intimidated by the "academic" sound of the words. These areas are simple enough once you play with them a little. The categories presented may not all have meaning to you. Concentrate on the ones that you think might apply to your child.

For example, you may have a child who has been labeled hyperactive because she can't concentrate on what is being presented. What are the methods the presenter is using? Many times these children are very successful in activity-based learning environments.

You may have a five year old who is old enough for kindergarten but is scheduled for the afternoon class. Is that time a good learning time for her? Does she still nap occasionally? If so, you may want to ask the principal to reschedule your child to the morning class.

You may have a middle schooler who hates going to school. Is she sitting at a desk the entire day? She may need opportunities to move around during class time.

Elements Of Learning Styles



Psychological

Use the information and research contained in this section as well as additional reading selections from the bibliography to your advantage when discussing these types of issues with your children's teachers, tutors and/or administrators.

There are two different modes for our brain to process information; globally and analytically.

Global

The **global learner** needs to see the **"BIG PICTURE"**, to associate the learning to something they already know and to have choices from a variety of different approaches to the learning.

Analytical

By contrast, **the analytic learner** thrives in a very structured learning format. Details, rules and procedures with specific step-by-step directions are of great comfort as is the use of numbers and words.

Research

The research on psychological learning styles indicates:

- Most young children are global learners.
- 50-60% of secondary students are global learners.
- As many as 85% of slowly achieving students cannot learn successfully in an analytic mode.
- 65% of teachers teach analytically.
  (Dunn, 1992)

Psychological Strategies
A. GLOBAL LEARNERS

- Start the learning time with a humorous story, anecdote or joke that is somehow related to the learning material.
- Allow the child to discover the answers. Try not to give away all the details initially.
- Allow the child to work in groups with their peers or siblings to synthesize the information.
- Have the children graph or illustrate the subject matter. Let them use pictures, photographs, symbols or other visual representations.
- Have the child show you what they've learned through presentation, dramatization or by playing a game they've developed about their learning.

Psychological Strategies
B. ANALYTIC LEARNERS

- Outline the specific objectives of the learning.
- Make sure all procedures and directions are clear.
- Have the child write out these objectives and directions on a chalk or white board where she can look up and see them.
- Have the child read and repeat back these objectives and directions.
- Have the child put key words on the board as well.
- Double check their understanding frequently.
- Take their work in small segments that can be tested for understanding and give feedback immediately.

Sociological

Cooperative learning, peer grouping and/or team or small group learning are very popular means of learning in today's classrooms. This is due to two major events: businesses wanting employees who are adept at working in teams and research that shows that students who learn in congruence with their sociological learning style and/or were exposed to various sociological learning environments achieved significantly higher test scores. (Dunn, 1992). A child's sociological learning style preference may be to work with an **adult**, in **groups** or **alone**.

A. Adult interaction is crucial for some children. These are the students who spend a lot of time asking the teacher for special assistance or latch onto a teacher's aide, parent or significant adult for acceptance and reinforcement.

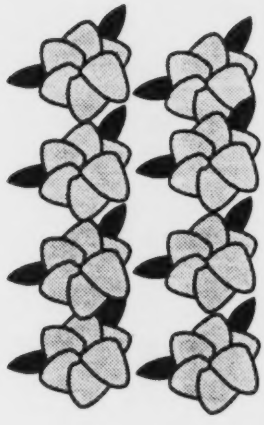
B. Peer-Groups can be very productive for the learners who find their information reinforced by discussion, interaction and debates.

C. Some students will always work better when left **alone**. They are typically introspective children who think things through and find themselves more productive when they can progress on their own terms.

Sociological Strategies

A. ADULTS	B. GROUPS	C. ALONE
• Hire a tutor. • Enroll them at a learning center. • Have an older sibling help them. • Work with a parent.	**Teams** • Establish play groups for preschoolers. • Establish study groups for school age children. **Pairs** • Have them pair up with a sibling. • Have them get together with a friend.	• Have the child design a study program that works for her. • Give your child the autonomy to make their own decisions and hold her accountable for the results.

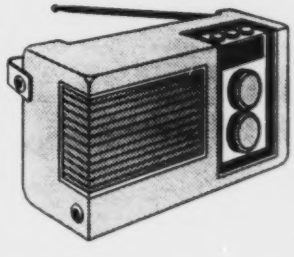
Environmental



The environment in which a child learns can have a large effect on the learning itself. The amount of **sound** and **light**, as well as the **design** of the work area and the temperature all play a role. While some would rather work at a desk with bright lights and no sounds, others prefer to curl up in a big cozy bean bag chair with a walkman. We know from research that each child is different and requires a space that makes sense to her.

Design refers to the layout of the area in which a child works. This includes everything from sitting on a cozy couch versus hard chair to corner cubby versus discussion table. These areas will not only vary from student to student but will vary from activity to activity.

Temperature refers to room temperature. You may have a very warm blooded child who is extremely uncomfortable in a warm room or another child who can't study when the air conditioner is too cool.



Sound plays a more important role than used to be thought. Although most of us were taught that complete silence was best, we now know that white noise or some music can actually help some students concentrate on new information.

Light is used to either stimulate or calm. Many teachers in today's classrooms never turn on the over-stimulating flores-cent lights and relay completely on natural light from window and/or skylights.

Environmental Strategies

DESIGN

1) Formal Setting

- Sit at a desk or table with a chair.
- Sit at the kitchen table.

2) Informal Setting

- Sit on the floor or on a bed.
- Sit in a cozy corner or couch/chair.
- Use car shades or cushions from lawn furniture to surround the child's space.

TEMPERATURE

- Try to give your child some control over temperature or recommend she dress accordingly in an inflexible environment.

SOUND

- Background music: Baroque music promotes better responsiveness than rock.
- Complete silence: Try ear phones not plugged into anything.
- White noise, like the sound of the dryer or fan, blocks out the smaller, more distracting noises.

LIGHT

- Florescent lighting can cause restlessness or hyperactivity in some children so try to avoid it.
- If your child prefers bright lighting, try **sitting her near a window** during the day.

- If your child prefers subtle lighting try using a lamp with a dimmer or place fireproof colored **paper over a regular light**. Have them wear sunglasses or visors while working.

Emotional

Your child's emotional well-being is an important aspect of her learning style preferences. Emotional learning style is divided into three categories:

1) The amount of **structure** they need to be successful learners.
2) Who or what **motivates** them to learn.
3) How **responsible** and **persistent** they are as learners.

Structure can be an innate talent or a developed strategy for success. Some children rely heavily on knowing what to expect while others seem to easily be able to "go with the flow". Children thrive in a structured, consistent environment in the early years but as they get older they need to provide their own level of structure for themselves.

Motivation is something most people deal with in many settings. Managers strive to find ways in which to motivate workers. While some workers need to be micro-managed because they need the boss' approval, others prefer to be left to themselves to accomplish a task. Children are the same. Some are very **self-motivated** while others require the **adult** overview. Pleasing the **teacher** can be a strong motivator for some children.

Responsibility and Persistence are great attributes. This is identified as an area to which we would expect all children to aspire. Be aware however, of the child who is over-achieving to a fault. On the other hand, some children need more guidance in this area in order for them to see themselves as personally responsible for their learning. Extremes at either end of the spectrum could be an indication of a greater emotional issue.

Emotional Strategies

STRUCTURE

- Develop an after-school schedule.
- Establish a completion time for homework.
- Do the important work first.
- Do all difficult work next.

MOTIVATION

1. **Encouraging Self-Motivated Children**

   The best source of your child's motivation is herself. Children who are self-motivated become intrinsically motivated adults. Attempt to instill strong self esteem and motivation by using the following phrases:

   - I can see you are really excited about your work.
   - How do you feel about what you've done?
   - What do you like best about your accomplishment?
   - What do you think you could do next time to make this even better?

2. **If a Child Needs Adult Interaction:**

   Adult encouragement may not appear to always work but it is always welcomed by children.

   - Include a simple written note of support or encouragement in their lunch or backpack.
   - Believe in your child and tell him everyday he can be anything he chooses.
   - Use the following, or others you have thought of, to encourage your children every day:
     - Smiling
     - Physical affection
     - Hugs
     - Listening
   - Show appreciation for her efforts.

3. If a Child is Motivated By Teacher Direction:

- Ask the teacher to support your expectations at home.
- Encourage the teacher to set out challenging work to do at home.
- Ask the teacher to recommend optional homework related to current course of study and educational materials/enrichment work for your child to do at home such as:
  - Computer software
  - Reading material

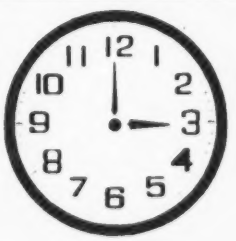
ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBLE AND PERSISTENT LEARNERS

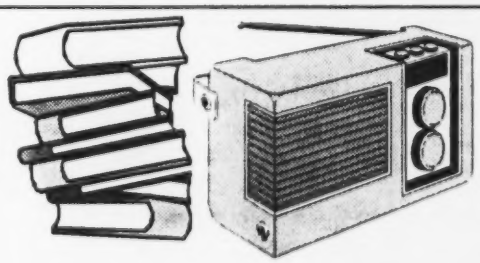
Mornings:

- Establish a reliable wake-up system.
  Allow plenty of time to get everything done.
  Make sure children eat breakfast.
  Have a specific place where kids put their school things.
  Leverage the commute time if possible to include learning activities. "Making your bed every day is a great way to begin your productive day!"

Afternoons:

- Establish an after-school schedule that includes:
  Snack
  Relaxation time
  Homework time
  Chores, duties and responsibilities around the house





Physiological

The physiological learning style of your child includes four different areas. **Perceptual** is the one on which most learning style experts concentrate. It is broken up into three major areas:

1. **Auditory learner** learns best through hearing the information.
2. **Visual learner** learns best when seeing the information.
3. **Kinesthetic** or **tactual learner** learns best when the learning involves an activity and/or incorporates the sense of touch.

Most children and adults are a combination of two or all three of these but once you understand your child's perceptual strength(s) you can facilitate her learning strategies as well as help her teacher understand her better.

The other three physiological learning styles are **time** of the learning, opportunity for **mobility** and **food** intake. These factors all play a role in how effectively your child takes in, retains and synthesizes information.

TIME (Dunn, 1992)

What does the research tell us about time?

- Most students are NOT alert early in the morning.
- Younger students in the primary grades learn best between 10am and 2pm.
- Approximately 28% of elementary students are morning people.
- Only 1/3 of junior high students learn best before 10am.
- 40% of high schoolers are early morning learners.
- Most high schoolers continue to learn best between 10am-2pm.
- 13% of high schoolers learn well in the evening.

MOBILITY

What does the research tell us about mobility?

- Most students who are referred to a psychologist for hyperactivity are normal children in need of mobility.
- The less interested the child is in what is being taught, the more mobility they require.
- Over 95% of children who are either formally or informally considered hyperactive are boys.
- 30% of all students require informal seating while concentrating.

INTAKE (food)

Some children need to snack during study/homework time. Others prefer not to be distracted by food. Some teachers allow children to have a snack during a particular time of morning or afternoon or whenever children get hungry. Be aware of your child's eating habits and how hunger effects her learning.

PERCEPTUAL:

Auditory, Visual and Kinesthetic/Tactual Learning Styles

What does the research tell us?

- Students who are **introduced** to new material through their preferred perceptual strengths remember more.
- Students who have material **reinforced** through their secondary or tertiary preferences achieve significantly more.
- Most primary students are **NOT** auditory learners. Therefore lectures, discussions and talking are the least effective means of learning.
- Young children are almost always kinesthetic/tactual learners. Their auditory abilities mature as they grow older.
- Underachievers, drop-outs and at-risk students are almost always kinesthetic/tactual learners. They need to be introduced through action and reinforced using auditory and visual strategies. (Dunn, 1992 and Reinke, 1995)

The Perceptual Learning Style Inventory

There is an overwhelming amount of attention given to the perceptual learning styles because of the impact it has on children's ability to learn and retain new information. The following page is an inventory you may choose to do on your child to attempt to find out what area(s) are strengths. Remember that all children (and adults) are a combination of all of these. Many children, however, are very strong in one area that may impact their ability to learn in certain learning environments.

My Child's Perceptual Learning Styles - Checklist

Directions: Place a check mark in the ☐ that applies to your child. Add up the number of checks at the bottom of the page to determine if he/she has an area that stands out.

Kinesthetic Strengths

☐ Has difficulty sitting when he/she has to listen.

☐ Prefers action oriented activities.

☐ Prefers to learn by doing.

☐ Has difficulty following oral instructions.

☐ Likes competition.

☐ Demonstrates emotion physically; pats, hits, hugs, high-fives.

☐ Has difficulty expressing him/herself using words.

TOTAL

Visual Strengths

☐ Can put something together without help using printed directions.

☐ Very observant of details.

☐ Good at solving puzzles.

☐ Likes to write and receive notes.

☐ Likes to see printed or drawn material when learning something new.

☐ Remembers better if able to picture it in his/her mind's eye.

☐ Would rather read information than have it read to him/her.

TOTAL

Auditory Strengths

☐ Can easily repeat lyrics after hearing a song once or twice.

☐ Talks to him/herself when working a problem.

☐ Easily follows oral directions.

☐ Likes to read aloud or murmur when reading.

☐ Doesn't like to read diagrams, maps or charts.

☐ Likes to talk a lot and is a good communicator.

☐ Remembers information better when heard than when seen.

TOTAL

Did your child's checklist indicate a predominant perceptual learning style? Does it differ from your own or from her siblings? Totals themselves may not show any conclusive style but you can begin to see patterns of preference emerging. If the checklist indicated strengths in all areas, this may indicate your child can easily adapt to various instructional styles. If the checklist indicated a strong preference for one area you may want to 1) ensure she receives instruction of new concepts in this way, and/or 2) work on strengthening her ability to be receptive to other instructional styles by encouraging her to use strategies across all styles.

Physiological Strategies

TIME	MOBILITY	INTAKE
• Find the best time for your child to study or do homework at home and support consistency in that decision. • Help your high school and college students to schedule classes during their most alert times.	• Allow children who need to move around a lot to get up and change seats or rooms during study and homework time or have them sit in a rocking chair. • Trust your child to develop their own learning environment that allows for as much mobility as they need. Insist that you see progress in their work.	• Find the best eating schedule for your child at home and stick with it. • Inform the teacher if you have a child who needs to snack and request they be allowed to eat when they are hungry in order to be able to concentrate on their studies.

Perceptual

Auditory Learner

- Read aloud to the child.
- Parent/Student share reading aloud by alternating pages.
- Allow children to mumble during reading.
- Allow children to use their fingers to keep place while reading.
- Make an auditory tape of math story problems.
- Set information to a familiar tune.
- Create a poem to remember material, e.g. 30 days hath September...
- Make tape recordings of notes.
- Study out loud.
- Make a tape of your child's daily lessons.
- Read a chapter into a tape recorder and play it back.

Visual Learner

- Use mind maps (like the learning styles example) to organize important information.
- Use a white board and colored dry erase markers for visual cues, clues, ideas, practice, etc.
- Write down math concepts or group math concepts.
- Create an illustrated Time Line.
- Create a summary of class notes.
- Use sticky notes to highlight important information.
- Use index cards with study information on them.
- Make a game on a manila folder to study for a test.
- Use a calendar or assignment notebook.

Kinesthetic/Tactual Learner

- Use sandpaper to trace or cut out letters, words or symbols.
- Use sand, pudding, shaving cream or whipping cream on the surface of a paper to trace letters, words, or ideas to remember.
- Make spelling words into word snakes by letting children make a curved line of spelling words.
- Use a Magna Doodle.
- Create puzzles.
- Put information to rap.
- Use sign language.
- Have math manipulatives (hands on materials) at home.
- Use a chalkboard or white board for student to write on.
- Put work on computer.
- Ride a stationary bike while reading.
- Throw a Nerf ball while studying.

Learning Style Review Matrix

ELEMENTS	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIES
	Psychological	
GLOBAL	Learns better when information begins with a "global picture."	Start lesson with anecdote. Allow students to discover solutions.
ANALYTICAL	Learns better when information is presented by details.	Outline specific objectives, clear directions and procedures.
	Sociological	
ADULT	Learns best with an adult.	Hire a tutor. Work with older sibling or friend.
PEER GROUPING TEAMS/PAIRS	Learns best with other students.	Establish a study group/pair.
SELF	Learns best when working alone.	Let student design study process. Let student set up times.
	Emotional	
STRUCTURE	Learns best when objectives and procedures are clear.	Post schedule for lesson. Do difficult work first.
RESPONSIBILITY & PERSISTENCE	Demonstrates responsibility and persists in learning new material.	Affirm these traits in all students provide chores and responsibilities at home.
MOTIVATION Self	Learns without outside motivation.	Affirm students learning. Ask for feeling about learning.
Adult	Learns best with adult encouragement.	Write child a note of support use smiles, hugs, listening.
Teacher	Learns well with teacher encouragement.	Ask teacher to recommend educational materials as teacher for challenging materials.

Learning Style Review Matrix (cont.)

ELEMENTS	DESCRIPTION	STRATEGIES
	Environmental	
DESIGN	Prefers certain physical layouts.	Provide beanbag chairs. Use car shades to make a cubby.
TEMPERATURE	Learning can be negatively affected with wrong temperature.	Student to control.
LIGHT	Learns best with varying degrees of light	Use color transparency paper over worksheet. Allow student input.
SOUND	Learns best when sound is either absent or the right kind.	Use earphones to block background noise. Use fan or dryer for "white noise".
	Physiological	
PERCEPTUAL Visual	Likes to see and write information.	• Highlighter pens • White boards • Sticky notes
Kinesthetic	Likes to be involved in activities.	Put work on computer. Use math manipulative.
Auditory	Likes to listen and talk.	Share "read aloud." Make auditory tapes.
TIME	Student's best time to learn.	Help schedule class and homework time.
MOBILITY	Students need to move while learning.	Change seats. Student picks study place.
INTAKE	Student's need to eat while learning.	Provide snacks at home and at school.

Gardner's Seven Ways of Learning

Howard Gardner has been writing about Multiple Intelligences since 1983. This is another way of looking at your child as a learner. Review each one carefully, thinking about whether or not this describes your child. Be aware that most of us are a combination of these and we should be cautious **NOT** to peg a child into one category. Instead, think about what can be described as your child's strengths and what would be considered weaknesses. Together these can be used to discuss your child as a learner.

The Linguistic Learner

- Likes to write.
- Spins tall tales or tells jokes and stories.
- Has a good memory for names, places, dates or trivia.
- Enjoys reading books in spare time.
- Spells words accurately and easily.
- Appreciates nonsense rhymes and tongue twisters.
- Likes doing crossword puzzles or playing games such as Scrabble or Anagrams.

Strategies For The The Linguistic Learner

- Talk to your child often.
- Provide lots of books, records and tapes of the spoken word.
- Create opportunities for writing.
- Supply tools for writing such as:
  White boards and color markers or label makers.
  Word processors or word processor programs on the computer.
  Magnetic Poetry
  Flip chart paper and scented markers.
- Read books together as a family.
- Have evening storytelling time.
- Take her to places where words are important such as:
  libraries, bookstores, newspaper offices, publishing houses.
- Critique and review written information.

The Logical/Mathematical Learner

- Computes arithmetic problems quickly in her head.
- Enjoys using computers.
- Asks questions like "Where does the universe end?" and "What happens after we die?" and "When did time begin?"
- Plays chess, checkers, or other strategy games, and wins.
- Reasons things out logically and clearly.
- Devises experiments to test out things they don't understand.
- Spend lots of time working on logic puzzles such as Rubik's Cube.

Strategies For The Logical/Mathematical Learner

- Supply them with games such as:
  Chess Battleship
- Provide logical puzzles to solve, science kits and educational computer games.
- Allow them to collect, categorize and classify things (butterflies, coins, stamps).
- Play mystery games like Clue.
- Go to science fairs, museums and electronics exhibitions.

The Spatial/Visual Learner

- Spends free time engaged in art activities.
- Reports clear visual images when thinking about something.
- Easily reads maps, charts, and diagrams.
- Draws accurate representations of people or things.
- Likes it when you show movies, slides or photographs.
- Enjoys doing jigsaw puzzles or mazes.
- Daydreams a lot.

Strategies For The Spatial Learner

- Show films, slides, videos, diagrams, maps and charts for learning.
- Provide opportunities to draw and paint.
- Provide cameras, telescopes, compasses for learning.
- Use 3-D building materials like Legos or architectural kits.
- Engage in visualization games.
- Tell vivid stories.
- Share dreams together as a family.
- Visit architectural landmarks, museums and art galleries.

The Musical Learner

- Plays a musical instrument.
- Remembers melodies of songs.
- Tells you when a musical note is off-key.
- Says they need to have music on in order to study.
- Collects records or tapes.
- Sings songs to themselves.
- Keeps time rhythmically to music.

Strategies For The Musical Learner

- Learn rote information using rhythm and tapping.
- Sing, tap or whistle important information.
- Use metronomes, percussion instruments or computerized sound systems.
- Allow her to study with music in the background.
- Go to the opera, musicals and/or concerts.

The Bodily/Kinesthetic Learner

- Does well in competitive sports.
- Moves, twitches, taps or fidgets while sitting in a chair.
- Engages in physical activities such as swimming, biking, hiking or skateboarding.
- Needs to touch people when she is talking to them.
- Demonstrates skill in a craft like woodworking, sewing or carving.
- Cleverly mimics other people's gestures, mannerisms or behaviors.

Strategies For The Bodily/Kinesthetic Learner

- Role play historical events or other important information.
- Provide opportunities for creative play.
- Be sure they are in a school with a large playground with obstacles courses and/or gymnasiums.
- Provide opportunities to fix, build or otherwise get involved with machines, models, wood or clay.
- Let her take care of small animals.
- Play physical games.
- Go to sporting events.
- Go camping together as a family.

The Interpersonal Learner

- Has lots of friends.
- Socializes a great deal at school or around the neighborhood.
- Seems to be "street-smart".
- Gets involved in after-school group activities.
- Serves as the 'family mediator" when disputes arise.
- Enjoys playing group games with other children.
- Has a lot of empathy for the feelings of others.

Strategies For The Interpersonal Learner

- Give her opportunities to teach other children.
- Supply her with games for two or more players.
- Get her involved in community activities/volunteer opportunities.
- Have frequent family discussions and problem-solving sessions.
- Go on family retreats and attend political, cultural, social events.

The Intrapersonal Learner

- Displays a sense of independence or a strong will.
- Reacts with strong opinions when controversial topics are being discussed.
- Seems to live in her own world.
- Likes to be alone to pursue some personal interest, hobby or project.
- Seems to have a deep sense of self-confidence.
- Marches to the beat of a different drummer in dress, behavior or general attitude.
- Motivates herself to do well on independent study projects.

Strategies For The Intrapersonal Learner

- Allow her the chance for independent study.
- Individualize projects and games.
- Provide space at home for privacy (room, tree house, fort).
- Respect her privacy.
- Provide the resources necessary to pursue particular interests.
- Go on family walks.
- Read about and discuss heroes.

Gardner's Seven Styles of Learning - Review

TYPE	LIKES TO	IS GOOD AT	LEARNS BEST BY
LINGUISTIC LEARNER "The Word Player"	Read Write Tell Stories	Memorizing names, places dates and trivia.	Saying, hearing and seeing words.
LOGICAL/ MATHEMATICAL LEARNER "The Questioner"	Do experiments, figure things out, work with numbers, ask questions explore patterns and relationships.	Math, reasoning, logic, problem solving.	Categorizing, classifying, working with abstract patterns/ relationships.
SPATIAL LEARNER "The Visualizer"	Draw, build, design and create things, daydream, look at pictures/slides, watch movies, play with machines.	Imagining things, sensing changes, mazes/puzzles, reading maps, charts.	Visualizing, dreaming, using the mind's eye, working with colors/pictures.
MUSICAL LEARNER "The Music Lover"	Sing, hum tunes, listen to music, play an instrument, respond to music.	Picking up sounds, remembering melodies, noticing pitches/rhythms, keeping time	Rhythm Melody Music
BODILY/ KINESTHETIC LEARNER "The Mover"	Move around, touch and talk, use body language.	Physical activities (sports/dance/acting), crafts.	Touching, moving, interacting with space, processing knowledge through bodily sensations
INTERPERSONAL LEARNER "The Socializer"	Have lots of friends, talk to people, join groups.	Understanding people, leading others, organizing, communicating, manipulating, mediating conflicts.	Sharing, comparing, relating, cooperating, interviewing.
INTRAPERSONAL LEARNER "The Individual"	Work alone pursue own interests.	Understanding, self focusing inward on feelings/dreams, following instincts, pursuing interests/goals, being original	Working alone, individualized projects, self-paced instruction, having own space

What Have Children Learned?

Parents need to be able to understand and keep track of the meaningful feedback they get from their children's school about their academic, social and emotional progress. Knowing on what the feedback is based (subjective teacher observations or objective nationally-normed tests, for example) as well as types of evidence of children's progress, will become very important information to share when and if the child is moved to a different state, district, school or even classroom.

What You Need To Know

There are many forms in which academic, social, emotional and even physical progress may be documented.

Tests

While there are no official national standards or curricula, there are nationally normed tests that will help you to understand how your child, school, district and state compare to others across the country. These tests are usually given in the 3rd, 7th and 10th grades. The best way to interpret these is to compare them to others with similar demographics. More is explained on pages 52 and 53.

Some states have state standards which should be assessed using a formal test that is directly related to these state standards. Arizona's AIMS test is an example of a test that is aligned with the state curriculum standards and used to assess student achievement. It is also used as a minimum competency test which students will be required to pass in order to graduate from high school.

Your district should have district assessment tests which will show how well your child is achieving the district curriculum objectives. These will be in the math, reading and language arts areas but may include science and social studies. Each year your child should be given this test to show how many of the grade level curriculum areas she has mastered. Parents should receive a copy of the test results for their child. Look these over carefully. If there are areas your child has not mastered, you may want to discuss this with her teacher and possibly hire a tutor.

Your child's teacher may also use classroom assessments throughout the year to evaluate what your child knows and doesn't know. These may be made up by the teacher, part of the textbook package or generic products such as reading inventories. These types of assessments are very valuable when used to make decisions about placement for reading groups or to be sure teachers are not reteaching what students already know.

Grades/Report Cards/Progress Reports

These reports are periodic windows into your child's progress from the teacher's perspective. This makes them subjective by nature but they are critically important. **Report cards** will vary from district to district and even school to school. In fact some schools no longer print report cards but use portfolios as evidence of learning. **Progress reports** are made up by the teacher and will vary from classroom to classroom. These should include descriptive observations of behaviors and accomplishments as well as efforts. Both of these documents should include a report on not just academics but social and emotional progress as well. Teachers should be able to back up grades with physical evidence based on some type of testing or performance analysis.

Products/Evidence Of Learning

Parents and teachers should be saving the products of the student's learning as evidence of progress or lack thereof. Parents may want to create a portfolio of visual or hard evidence to share if you move or to address concerns with a teacher. Remember grade level curriculum expectations in one state may be different from those of another. District and classroom expectations may vary as well. Use this evidence to support your claims about your child's progress and to help teachers and school officials to understand why you say this.

If you ever move to another area of the country, even though the school will request your child's file, it will improve the new teachers' ability to meet your child's academic, social and emotional needs quicker if you carry evidence before the first day.

Examples Of Products Include:

Homework	Progress Reports	Report Cards	Writing Samples
Artwork	Science Projects	Book Reports	Books Read
Portfolios	Plays Performed	Awards	Written Reports

What Should Parents Do?

1. Inform yourself about the tests used in your district, school and classroom.

Ask:

- What specifically, is the test trying to evaluate?
- Does the test actually evaluate what it claims to evaluate?
- What are the minimum/maximum age levels for the test?

2. Find out what other tests are being used to diagnose and/or evaluate the students:

- What non-standardized assessments are used?
- Do they have performance-based or criterion reference testing?
- Do they have academic goals and standards for each grade level?
- How are these evaluated?
- Do students keep portfolios (evidence) of their educational progress?

3. Keep records of your child's learning progress at home:

- Observe and document (keeper drawer) evidence of progress.
- Keep a diary of after-school and weekend learning experiences.
- Tape your child reading his/her favorite book. Date the tape and keep.
- Let your child choose the 'best' of his/her work to keep.
- Videotape your child doing what he/she loves best (sports, Scouts, piano).
- Engage your child in the process of self-assessment.
- Videotape collections of art work, crafts, etc.

Types Of Tests

Ask your district and/or school which of these type tests they use and how/when they are administered. This will help you monitor and prepare your child.

Academic Screening Tests
Usually given at the beginning of kindergarten or first grade, these tests set out to determine if a child has all the skills necessary to move forward in public school.

Criterion Reference Tests
Given once or twice a year, these tests set out to determine mastery level in areas such as reading and math but may not include social studies, science and language arts. Scores are used to compare students' progress in comparison to previous scores or to compare student progress across a district.

Minimum Competency Tests
Usually given in the last years of high school, many districts and schools have devised these tests to determine if students have achieved mastery in reading and math (sometimes language arts). In some states the outcomes are used for graduation requirements. For example, Arizona uses the AIMS test that is directly aligned with the state academic standards.

Ability or Aptitude Tests
Commonly called intelligence tests, these set out to determine a child's potential for learning. They generally cover verbal, logical (mathematical), and spatial abilities. In most districts they are used to place children in gifted programs. Examples include the CogAt and WISC-R.

Diagnostic Testing
The purpose of these tests is to determine if a child has a particularly significant handicap in one area of learning and diagnose the source. A child is unable to receive special education services until they have been tested and scored within a particular range.

Types Of Tests (cont.)

Standardized Tests

These tests should be used to gauge how your child, your school, your district and/or your state is doing compared to the rest of the nation's children. The best comparisons are those against communities with similar demographics. These tests are usually administered in 3rd, 7th and 10th grades but may be given every year if the school district so chooses. Iowa Test of Basic Skills and Stanford Nine are examples.

About Standardized Testing

"Standardized testing has been a fixture in American public schools for decades and recent years the importance assigned to achievement test scores has greatly increased." (Nolen, Haladyna, Haas, 1992). The widespread use and misuse of these tests has been hotly debated over the past few years.

Typically used to evaluate student achievement, national standard achievement tests, such as the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, are criticized for the following reasons:

- Curriculum across the nation varies greatly. "Students learn different material in different districts, [therefore] national norms might not fit local instruction," (Kaufhold, '95).
- Students across the nation vary greatly. "Rural and urban, ethnic and racial, as well as socio-economic factors are all examples of how the values, expectations and motivations of the nation's children impact their learning," (Kaufhold '95).
- Political uses of the test scores are a powerful force. "It is widely recognized that achievement test scores are used inappropriately," (Paris, et al., '91). Newspapers, real estate agents, and policy makers, to name a few, use and misuse these statistics to their own ends by misleading the public.
- Teachers, under pressure from their supervisors, have been known to attempt to manipulate test scores to their own benefit as well as the district's benefit. Everything from "teaching to the test" to actually changing test scores has occurred.

This severely skews the test results to no benefit of the students themselves, (Dewey, '93).

Standardized testing continues to play a significant role in our school system for the following reasons:

- It provides a quantitative comparison for school districts to measure their success against other districts with an "aura of scientific respectability and rigor," (Paris, et al., '91).
- It provides parents with a tool for comparing their children against other students or their district against other districts, both locally and nationally, in an environment where teacher and administrative subjectivity and bias proliferate, (Paris, et al., '91).
- It provides teachers with valuable assessment information about students that can be used to establish curriculum and instructional goals, (Brown & Walberg, '93).

John A. Kaufhold, in his article "Testing, Testing, Why your board shouldn't take standardized test too seriously", found in the American School Board Journal, (Jan '95) argued that standardized tests should be replaced by local "Criterion Referenced Test" constructed by local teachers [that] show what students have learned from their textbooks and the curriculum that exists in their school," (Kaufhold, '95). Other suggestions were:

- Take a baseline measurement to determine individual growth as opposed to population comparisons.
- Compare with care. Pick districts with similar demographics when comparing test scores.
- Compare students, not grade levels, by tracking the same group of students from year to year as opposed to looking at the same grade level each year.

Use observations and samples of learning as well. Although test scores are perhaps simpler, attempt to look at the whole picture before drawing conclusions that might be inaccurate.

Additional Resources

- Awakening Your Child's Natural Genius by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., Putnam's Sons Publishing, 1991.
- In Their Own Way by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., Putnam's Sons, 1987.
- Multiple Intelligences In the Classroom by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., ASCD, 1994.
- Teaching Elementary Students Through Individual Learning Styles by Rita & Kenneth Dunn, Allyn and Bacon, 1992.
- Helping Your Child Succeed in Public School by Cheri Fuller, Focus on the Family Publishing, 1993.
- Unlocking Your Child's Learning Potentia by Cheri Fuller, Pinon Press, 1994.
- Multiple Intelligences by Howard Gardner, Basic Books, 1983
- The School Book by Mary Susan Miller, Ph.D., St Martin's Publishing, 1991.

PART THREE:

Communicating With Your School

It is a shame that while schools of education teach teachers how to develop curriculum, plan instruction and understand child development, most neglect to teach teachers how to include parents in their plan. In our parent involvement workshops I have heard far too many teachers purposely shut out a child's parents from their education saying, "We've got to keep parents from just walking in here whenever they like!" or "Parents don't need to be involved at school. They just aren't doing what they are supposed to be doing at home." At the same time I have heard parents abdicate their responsibilities saying, "It's the school's problem. It's their job to deal with kids for six hours a day." or attempt to take control by exercising an inappropriate amount of influence over the classroom instruction and/or school policies. The system actually supports an environment of <u>us</u> versus <u>them</u> forcing parents and teachers to approach a child's learning from separate camps. It is time for every school to welcome parents as partners in their childrens' educational environment.

Why Communicate?

A Strong Parent-Teacher Partnership Depends On:

- Trust
- Mutual Respect
- Open Communication
- Honesty
- Active Listening/Openness
- Flexibility
- Caring
- Understanding
- Shared Responsibility
- Full Disclosure of Information

(Martin,1995, p.10)

It is important for parents to realize how crucial a positive partnership between parents and teachers really is to the child. Just as children will play off their parents if they do not communicate, they will do the same between the teacher and the parent. One of the most important pieces of this partnership is open and honest lines of communication between home and school.

If your are sending your first child off to kindergarten, you are probably remembering that the last time you were in a public school was your last year in high school. Many things have changed significantly since then while others have remained eerily the same. We strongly encourage you to become very familiar with the "players" in your child's education system so when/if a situation arises, support and assistance are readily available.

While it seems more communication is based around reactive situations, it is important to note that proactive communications are strongly encouraged. A simple Thank You Note every so often or advanced notice if your child is going to be out of school will win over the teacher's trust and confidence that you are working together.

What will be shared inside this section are the best practices for parent/system communications. Whether your child's "system" is private education, charter school or a district system, you will find information, tools and strategies inside to assist you in your efforts. Use your finest communications skills and personal relations skills, along with your best judgment and the strategies

herein, and you will find yourself to be the thread that links your child through the entire kindergarten through 12th grade education.

Ways To Communicate

There are many ways to communicate to and with your child's teacher and school. It is important to know your options for communication and how to apply them most effectively. The two types of communication, One Way and Two Way, can be categorized under Informal and Formal methods as depicted below:

	INFORMAL	FORMAL
ONE WAY	• Notes • E-mail • Voice Mail	• Surveys • Letters • Progress Reports • Newsletters • Report Cards • Presentations: i.e. Curriculum Night
TWO WAY	• Conversations • Phone Calls	• Conferences • Parent/Teacher • Portfolio • Student Driven • Issue Driven • Decision Making • Child Study Team Meetings/Committees • PTO/PTA • Site Council

Many communications are **One Way** or one-sided meaning that either the teacher or the parent is providing information to the other. You are giving the teacher information about your child that you feel is important for him to have in order to meet your child's academic, social and emotional needs. It may be as formal as a letter or as informal as a sticky note or voice mail. The teacher also provides many types of One Way communications which may be as formal as progress reports and report cards or as informal as a note on your child's weekly calendar. While these take on many forms, the advantage of this type of communication is that it is quick, concise and meets the objective of information sharing without having to dialogue. The disadvantage is that sometimes the dialogue is necessary for clear understanding.

The other, less frequent, way to communicate with your child's teacher and/or school is **Two Way** communications in which both parties take time to express their viewpoints, listen and respond to the other. There are different levels of depth, openness and trust that comprise Two-Way communication. These levels are discussion, debate, problem-solving and dialogue. The level you wish to be on with your child's teacher depends upon your objective. For example, a quick conversation outside the door in the morning or over the phone will probably suffice for the minor issues such as to clarify assignments or to share an important piece of information about your child's social, emotional or physical well being. However, it may be appropriate to set up a formal Two Way conference to discuss a more serious problem such as chronic academic difficulties, problems with peers or behavioral concerns.

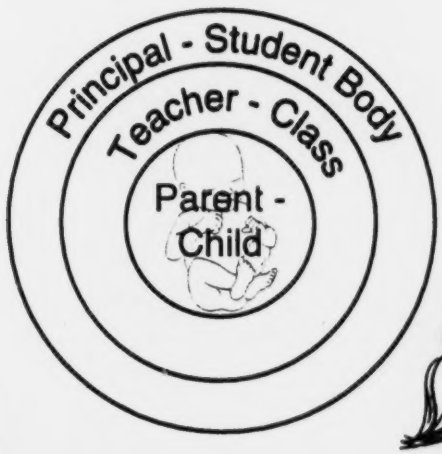
When Written Communication Is Most Effective

Any time your point of view or opinion is put in writing it is considered documented evidence. This is a powerful tool that can be used both to your advantage and disadvantage. It is useful when you wish to keep a record of your interactions, requests and/or concerns in case you should need them for future reference. For example, you have a concern about the safety of your child on the playground. You have notified the teacher, principal and playground attendant, but have not seen the issue resolved to your satisfaction. If you have documented each of the instances in which you have discussed your concern with each of the staff members, this will make it easier for you to demonstrate your efforts when you take your concern to the next level.

It is also a good idea to write out your issues, concerns and/or comments when going into a formal meeting with school staff. If you can provide each person in the meeting with a copy of your notes or main points, it will make it easier for them to retain the most critical points you wish to make. It is important to note that written communications can also be used against you if someone should choose to do so.

The Hierarchy Of Advocacy

When making requests of your school's staff, keep in mind their responsibilities to the students as well as your responsibilities to advocate for your child. The teacher, while she cares about your child, advocates for the needs of all her students in the classroom and the principal is there to see all students' needs in the school are met. The more you can learn about how these professionals approach the realities of their positions the more likely it is that you, as a parent, will be able to meet your child's individual needs.



ACADEMIC NEEDS

SOCIAL NEEDS

KEEP IN MIND ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR CHILD WHEN ADVOCATING FOR HIM/HER

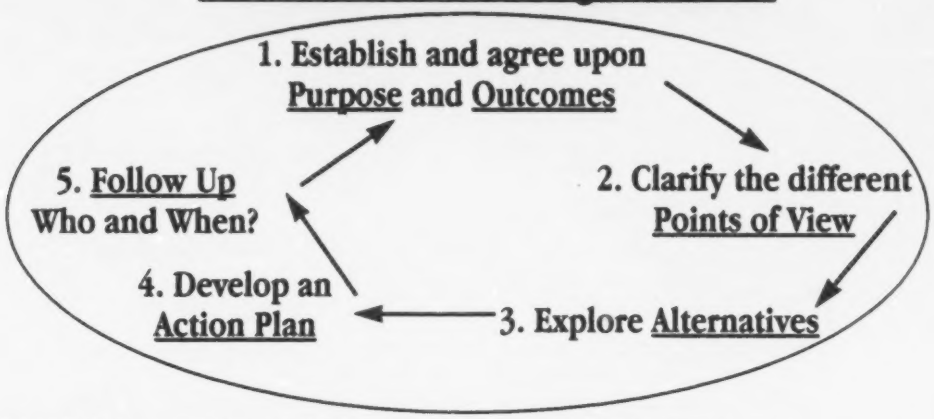
PHYSICAL NEEDS

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Strategies For Effective Two Way Communications

When you are in the school advocating for your child or even expressing a concern, it is recommended that you adhere to the following time-tested process to ensure success:

Productive Meeting /Process


1. Establish and agree upon Purpose and Outcomes
2. Clarify the different Points of View
3. Explore Alternatives
4. Develop an Action Plan
5. Follow Up Who and When?

1. **Establish and Agree Upon Purpose and Outcomes**
   This may be done before you meet or at the beginning of the meeting. Be sure everyone in the room is clear on what is to be accomplished. Is it a plan, a decision, or simply exploration of ideas? Identify the issues and concerns and establish who the final decision-maker will be if the group cannot agree.
2. **Clarify the Different Points of View**
   Find out where the other people (person) in the room are coming from. What is their perspective of the situation? Take the time to listen carefully and try to put yourself in their shoes so you may fully understand their points of view.
3. **Explore Alternatives**
   Spend some time coming up with possible solutions to your concern(s). Try to come up with at least 3 from which to choose. Then list all the pros and cons of each solution as a group.
4. **Develop an Action Plan**
   Get consensus from the group about which solution would be best. If agreement cannot be reached, turn to the final decision-maker for conclusion. Hopefully this is you but remember that you always have the right to take this to a higher authority or find another educational environment for your child if you are not satisfied.
5. **Follow Up**
   Be clear about **when** you will review this plan be be sure it is working. **Who** will initiate that communication? **When** can you expect to hear something?

More Strategies For Effective Conferences

Use Respectful and Clear Language	Avoid Being Vague and/or Rude
"I have a concern about my daughter's progress in math."	"You're not a very effective math teacher."
"What is it going to take to be able to do this?"	"What are you going to do about it?"
"Can we meet to address my concerns about my son's reading scores?"	"I really need to talk to you."
"I would like to request that you call me next time this happens."	"You need to call me if this ever happens again!"

Present Evidence To Support Your Point Of View

- Keep products of your child's learning throughout the year to use as evidence of a concern that he/she is not progressing academically.
- Write out observations of behavior that you can share to support a concern about your child's social and/or emotional well-being.
- Keep notes and share examples of your child's observations.

Listen Empathically
"Seek first to understand. . . then to be understood"

1. **Mimic Content** - "You want to move my child to a lower reading group."
2. **Rephrase the Content** - "You think my child could benefit academically from being in a lower reading group."
3. **Reflect the Feeling** - "You are concerned about my daughter's ability to be successful in the group she is currently working in."
4. **Rephrase the Content and the Feeling** - "You are concerned that she is not performing successfully with her current group so you are suggesting she be placed in another reading group that matches her skills better."

Remember: In empathic listening, the focus is on the other person, not your feeling, motivations, experiences.

(From 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey)

Parent/Teacher Communications

There are many opportunities throughout each school year to communicate with your child's teacher. Perhaps the process had begun even before the previous year was over and will last even after your child has been promoted to the next grade level. Typically, communications are chronological in nature and each time frame has its unique objectives. Some are "building" by the school or grade level team while others arise as needed and are initiated by the parent or teacher. Here are some ideas for communicating you may want to take advantage of and/or create!

Beginning Of The Year
Introduce Your Child and Communicate Your Support

While you may choose to do this verbally at **Meet the Teacher** or the beginning of the year **Open House**, there is nothing like a formal communication to your child's teacher. In this formal communication from you, let your child's teacher know you are there to support him this year and that you have information about your child that may prove helpful. Invite him to contact you during the day and/or evening and leave the phone numbers and e-mail address where you can be reached. Encourage him to do so whenever he feels it is necessary. If you have had previous issues regarding your child that you think would be helpful for him to know about before the first day of school, include them in this communication.

Recommended Beginning-of-the-Year Communications

Letter: No more than two (2) pages in length, this letter may include information about your child's learning style, emotional and social needs as well as hobbies, interests and a brief family profile. Ask the teacher to feel free to call you if there are any concerns or questions about your child and leave both your home and work numbers. Do this before the first day of school if possible or send it with your child on the first day. (See Appendix page 167 for Learning Styles Checklist.)

Phone Call: If you choose to do it verbally, either a phone call or face to face limited visit is recommended. Teachers are very busy just before the first day of school, call the school and leave a message for the teacher to call you at her convenience. Leave times when you are easiest to get. This means of communicating with the teacher at the beginning of the year has its advantages because it is less formal and has more of a personal touch. On the other hand, it may be more intrusive for the teacher, doesn't provide the documented evidence of your communication and probably isn't as concise as the written recommendation.

Send a Thank You Note After The First Week:

The first week of school is always the toughest because it is such a critical transition time for everyone. If you feel your child's teacher made the first week go well for your child, send a small "thank you" note to show your appreciation. Teachers really enjoy this type of support, especially after a grueling week with new students.

Fill Out Any Teacher Requests For Information On Your Child:

There may be a health card from the nurse's office, student data for the front office or a request for personal information about your child from the teacher. Take the time to fill out all teacher and school requests for information as soon as possible. Help your child and her teacher by being prompt, honest and concise in your responses. These are not meant to take a lot of time to complete or read. Make it easy for the teacher to read through your responses and understand immediately what you mean. Include short examples if you think it would be helpful. Although you may perceive all of the paperwork you need to fill out for the school or your child's teacher excessive, remember this is to help the staff be more successful at interacting with your child throughout the year.

During The Year - Informal

The most important things to remember about informally communicating with your child's teacher during the year are:

- Show respect for the teacher's time.
- Speak respectfully at all time.

Parent/Teacher Conversations

Many teachers and parents discuss concerns in short conversations that take place over the phone or in front of the classroom door while you are picking up or delivering a child. For example, a parent may have a question about something directly related to his child or the classroom such as homework, behavior or something the teacher is doing he finds questionable. Most of the time, the conversation is initiated to get clarification or information about this concern.

Use these opportunities sparingly. Most teachers don't make the time at the beginning or end of the day to discuss issues with parents. If you are simply looking for clarification, try to keep the conversation brief to be respectful of teacher time. If the conversation takes longer than anticipated, offer to come in for a conference and ask when the teacher might be available.

A teacher may also initiate a conversation with a parent to get clarification about something the child did or said that the teacher found questionable. In any case these types of communications are NOT decision-making by nature so if you find yourself brainstorming or suggesting answers, you may want to schedule a formal conference to discuss it further.

Examples Of Reasons For Initiating a Conversation

- Concern about a particular teaching strategy.
- A new, inappropriate behavior you have seen in your child.
- Homework is taking too much time for your child after school.

FYI Communications

These communications are one-way and usually come in the form of notes, letters, phone calls, voice mail or e-mail. They tend to be brief and informative in nature like a quick FYI that your child will be out of school for a couple of days or your child has been suffering from headaches recently and would the teacher please keep her eye on him.

If you think the concern or question you were thinking about probably requires a short answer, you may want to deliver the message in one of the forms listed on page 60. This way the teacher can answer when she has time. The most important things to remember about informally communicating with your child's teacher during the year are:

- Go to all opportunities to hear the teacher give out information to groups.
- Read all the information that is sent home.
- Let the teacher know anytime something has occurred that may potentially affect your child's ability to learn.

Parent/Teacher Conferences - Formal

Most conferences are short, lasting anywhere from 15-30 minutes. The objective is for you to understand where your child is academically and what the teacher's plans are for increasing student achievement. You should expect this no matter the academic level at which your child already demonstrates mastery. Traditionally these conferences take place twice a year, after the first quarter and near the end of the school year.

You should never miss these chances to get a glimpse into your child's educational portfolio. You may want to have your child sit in on the conference. It will become increasingly more important for your child to see his very important role in his academic success. This also gives your child a chance to see the teacher and parent together as partners supporting his efforts. Check with the teacher to find out if this is allowed or encouraged.

Parent/Teacher Conference Strategies

- Arrive on time.
- Respect the time allotted for you.
- Prepare your questions ahead of time. For example:
  Are there some areas we can be working on at home?
  How is my child performing in this area compared to his peers?
  Why is my child not performing in this area?
- Look for areas in which your child is excelling and one or two areas in which your child can improve.
- Communicate and support this at home with your child.

Portfolio or Student-Driven Conferences

These are different in that your child will be demonstrating her progress using products of learning. This is an excellent opportunity to see the educational products your child has been producing at school. You should be monitoring this progress throughout the school year but these products have been held specifically to share at this conference. Look for progress! Applaud your child's efforts.

Strategies For Portfolio Conferences

- Observe the level of competence by the products your child shares with you.
- Ask yourself if the product shows improvement from previous examples.

Examples of products to monitor:

Degree of difficulty of reading material.
Fluency in reading aloud.
Level of math computation.
Application of math concepts.
Detail in written work.
Grammar and vocabulary in written work.
Application of spelling in written work.
Watch for other products related to science, social studies, health, etc.

Look For Social and Emotional Progress

During these regularly scheduled conferences you will most likely hear much about your child's academic progress. Remember, schools are charged with making sure your child is developing socially and emotionally. Just as when they were little, you may notice that your child develops at a different rate than her peers. Maybe she is less mature and not ready let go of her male friends in 3rd grade. Your son may not be interested in going to the school "mixer" or dance in 6th grade. Allow them to grow at their own rate. If you or the teacher sees concerns in these areas, they should be discussed and strategies agreed upon by both of you.

What does Social/Emotional Progress Look Like?

- Expect feedback from your child's teacher about your child's behavior.
- Ask yourself and your child's teacher if your child's behavior is appropriate for their age and grade.
- Be observant of your child's interaction with his peers at home.
- Consult with professionals such as a teacher, principal, school psychologist or counselor if you have any questions or concerns.

Issue-Driven Conferences

These are the conferences that occur because an issue has arisen that either the teacher, parent or both believe requires parent/teacher collaboration to solve. Make sure when scheduling the conference that the issue is clear so that you can come prepared to discuss, problem-solve and commit time and energy to the resolution. Don't try to solve the problem in a conversation prior to the conference. Listen carefully to the teacher's perspective of the situation before jumping to conclusions and solutions. It usually helps to gain some insight from your child prior to the conference as well to get her perception of the issue. Use the Two Way Communication Process described on page 63.

Strategies For Communication During Issue-Driven Conferences

- Put in writing the main points you wish to cover.
- Be sure you understand the objective of the meeting/conference.
- Thank the school official for taking the time to speak with you.
- Start with a positive statement of support for the school as a whole or the teacher.
- Speak only about your child. Avoid discussing other children by name.
- Be respectful. Do not swear, yell or call him names.
- Be sure you are getting a clear answer to your questions. Plead ignorance and ask them to restate the explanation so you can understand.
- Ask the principal to join you if you feel the teacher is not understanding or supporting you as a parent.

Decision-Making Conferences

During the school year it may become necessary to make significant changes that impact others in the school such as moving to a different classroom or double promotion (skipping a grade). It should require using a process that would be applicable to any parent/student in that situation. Be sure to include student input where applicable.

Example

- Include all stakeholders (those affected) in the process e.g. teacher, principal, parent, student, potential teacher.
- Identify the final (fallback) decision-maker if all do not agree.
- Clarify all viewpoints.
- Discuss all options.
- Narrow options.
- Decide best option.
- Decide when to revisit to decide if this worked.

Use the Two Way communication process described on page 63.

Child Study Team Meetings

These are meetings or conferences that include school officials other than just your child's teacher. They may include the special education teacher, gifted specialist, school psychologist and/or principal or assistant principal. As in the previous example, it should be clear what the issue is prior to the meeting and who exactly will be in attendance. These meetings are usually called when an issue is of an extreme nature and requires "intervention" of some kind to solve. Ask, before beginning the meeting, who the final decision-maker will be.

Parents Rights (Martin, 1995 p. 25)
You Have The Right To:

- Refuse to permit the evaluation.
- Review all records related to your child.
- Review all procedures involved in team meetings.
- Attend and participate in all multi-disciplinary team meetings related to your child's needs.
- Know that your child's educational program will not be drastically changed without your knowledge.
- Be informed of and give written permission for an individual evaluation of your child.
- Bring a friend or a professional with you to all team meetings.
- Know the results of all individual evaluations of your child, including psychological and educational evaluations.
- Get an outside evaluation for your child from an independent, qualified examiner if you disagree with the findings of the school's evaluation team.
- Be told when a referral is made for special education and/or related services. Initial placement or services will be provided only with your written consent.

Who do You Call?

Who Can Answer Your Questions About. . .

Absences	Teacher, Secretary, Principal
Academic Expectations	Teacher, Asst. Principal, Principal
School Sponsored Activities	Teacher, Parent Sponsor,Principal
Admission/Enrollment	Secretary, Principal
Honors/Gifted	Gifted Resource Teacher, Principal
Behavior	Teacher, School Counselor, School Psychologist, Principal
District Guidelines	Superintendent, School Board
Calendar	Secretary, Principal, School Board
Changing Classes/Teachers	Principal, Asst. Principal
Classroom Issues	Teacher, Principal
Clubs	Sponsor, Teacher
Family Counseling	Principal, School Psychologist, School Counselor
Curriculum	Teacher, Principal
Discipline/Detention	Teacher, Asst. Principal, Principal
D.A.R.E.	D.A.R.E.Officer, Principal
Field Trips	Teacher, Principal, PTO
Grading Guidelines	Teacher, Principal
Grievances	Teacher, Principal
Immunization Forms	School Secretary, Nurse
Make-Up Work	Teacher, Homework hotline
Parents Committees	PTO/PTA/FTO, Principal
Parent Conferences	Teacher, Principal
Parent-Teacher Organization	PTO/PTA/FTO, Teacher, Principal
Peer-Counseling	School Counselor, Psychologist
School Philosophy	Teacher, Principal, Site-Based Team
Report Cards	Teacher Principal
Retention	Teacher, Principal, Psychologist
Special Education	Special Ed. Teacher, Teacher
Standardized Tests	School Psychologist, Principal

(Martin, '95 p. 7 & 8)

End Of The Year

At the end of the year, the teacher gets ready to send your child off to the next grade. She files grades, progress reports, test scores and other critical notes related to your child in your child's "permanent file". As a parent, you have the right to look at this file at any time but what you'll find in there should be what the teacher has already shown you.

Have an End-of Year Conference

By the end of the year it is critical that you feel comfortable that your child has met her curriculum objectives for the year. These are hard to make up, especially after a long summer break where she may come in even further behind. At the last conference for the year you will want to have time to discuss what your child knows and doesn't know in the context of her grade level curriculum.

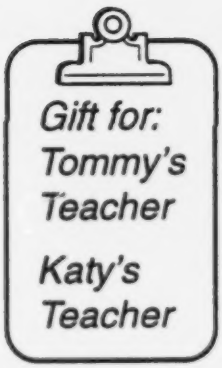
Ask the teacher for recommendations of supplemental or remedial materials if needed. Where would you be able to get these materials? Your school should have a list of certified teachers in the district who can tutor in the summer if the recommendation is tutorial remediation.

One of the best ways to ensure your child has the best teacher to meet his individual learning needs the next year is to consult with his current teacher. Ask her for teacher recommendations for the next grade level if she is familiar enough with the styles of the teachers in the next grade level. If you don't already know how the placement process for the school works, ask the teacher if there is some kind of input form you can fill out to give your parental input into placement.

What To Consider When Giving Input For Placement

- Peers you would not want in the same classroom.
- Teaching styles.
- Classroom environments.

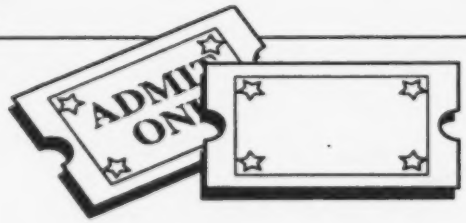
Consider Giving a Gift



Many parents choose to have their child present a gift to the teacher at the end of the year. While most teachers don't expect this, it is a nice way to say thank you for the year. Don't make it an outrageous gift as most districts have limits on what teachers may accept and it may set up a competitive atmosphere between parents and between teachers.

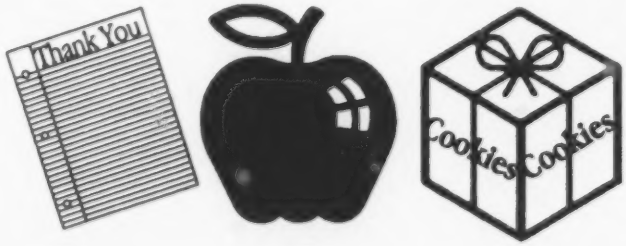
Ideas For Gifts

- Movie passes.
- Dinner certificates.
- Gift certificates to teaching supply stores.
- Student-made.
- Home made.



Send a Thank You Note

If you choose not to send a gift or would like to give something from you, as a parent, a nice Thank You note is always cherished. Be specific with your praise by giving at least one example of how he affected your child's life that year. If you send it in the form of a letter, send a copy to the principal as a way to give him recognition, at the school level, for his efforts.



Parent/School Communications

Your school is charged with keeping track of your child in every way. Principals lead the process of making sure every student in the school gets his academic, social and emotional needs met for the entire school year. Most parents and students never see the principal except when there is a problem. We recommend a more proactive approach to knowing your principal as well as other school personnel.

Beginning Of The Year - School Enrollment

If you are enrolling your child in the school for the first time, either because they are entering kindergarten or are transferring from another school, you will want to get a registration form from the office. At that time, they will tell you what other documents they will need from you to complete the enrollment process.

Examples of Documentation

- Withdrawal slip from previous school (if transferring).
- Birth certificate.
- Immunization records.
- Proof of residency (such as utility bill, mortgage or lease contract).

Be sure to ask about any special programs or instructional options for which you may want to sign your child, such as multi-age instruction, Montessori method, gifted programs, special education programs, before and after school child care. You will find further details about school options and choices in the chapter titled **Finding the Right School.**

Fill Out all Forms For the School Completely and In a Timely Manner

In order for the school or district to receive funds from the state, they must have a registration form from the parent or guardian.

This should never contain false or misleading information! This would be considered fraudulent.

Get a Copy of the School Handbook

This document contains critical information about school and district policies. Read everything inside to be sure you clearly understand what is expected of you, the parent and your child. Usually there is a page that needs to be signed by you and your child that explains that you have read this handbook and understand its contents. It should be returned to your child's teacher or the office.

Examples of What May be Contained in the Handbook

- School's Mission/Vision statement(s)
- School calendar for the year
- Policy statements regarding Retention, Promotion, Special Needs Programs
- Transportation
- School Procedures
- Health Information
- Behavior Expectations
- Guidelines for Student Conduct
- Discipline Philosophy

Fill in Student Health Card

This card contains all the information the nurse or other school personnel might need about your child in case of a medical emergency. Be sure not to leave any spaces blank.

Get a Copy of the Curriculum For Your Child's Grade Level

Ask the school for a copy of the curriculum and/or academic expectations for your child. Teachers may be giving this out at a special evening event. In any case you will need to know what the academic expectations are for your child for the school year. If the curriculum is written in language that is not familiar to you, ask the teacher to clarify.

During The Year - Reporting an Absence

Report your child as absent to the office attendance line or secretary. This is crucial because they must know where your child is during the school day. If the office doesn't have notification from you that your child is absent, they must track the child down for the child's protection.

Filing a Complaint

It is recommended that any concerns you have about your child be addressed between you and your child's teacher(s). There may be times, however, when your concern would need to be addressed by a school administrator.

Examples of Instances

- Teacher was unresponsive (see next page).
- Related to special program outside of the regular classroom.
- Having to do with a school policy.
- Having to do with school discipline plan.
- Playground related incident.

When The Teacher Is The Problem

While we would love to believe that all teachers are caring, capable, intelligent people, we know that there are teachers who should be pursuing other career choices. If you feel that your child's teacher is affecting his ability to learn for any reason and you have attempted to address your concerns to this teacher to no avail, then we recommend the following strategies:

- **Act immediately**. Waiting too long into the year, the principal or teacher may convince you to hang in there until the year is over. It also makes it more difficult for your child to transition to a new environment.
- **Put your concerns in writing** and attach any evidence or documentation. Don't allow school officials to reduce your concerns to hearsay or gossip.
- **Ask other parents** in the classroom if they are also experiencing problems. This is a reality check for you to determine if your concerns are valid and to determine if other parents wish to join forces with you.
- **If you suspect there is retaliation against your child**, put it in writing. Although this is rare, it does happen and can be documented.
- **Insist on a transfer to another teacher** if there is no improvement. Don't be placated by the claim that things will improve with time. Your child deserves a better teacher today.
- **Consider staying put if your concern is related to only one area of the curriculum.** There is a delicate balance of academic, social and emotional needs that is encompassed within your child's school environment. If moving to a new classroom disrupts the social/emotional side to the extent that it affects his ability to achieve academically, your cause is lost. Consider all alternatives before pulling a child from a classroom.
- **Be sure your concern is directly related to your child and not to your relationship with the teacher.** There are some teachers that do wonderfully with children but not well with parents. Ask your child how he feels about the idea of getting a new teacher before making this change.

End Of The Year - The School's Placement Process

Here is one school's example of their placement process. If used, it should be published and sent to all parents so those interested in communicating their perspective regarding their child's future teacher may do so.

Sample Process

Step 1 - Parent Input/Concerns
Step 2 - Current Teacher Input
Step 3 - Principal Input
Step 4 - Initial Placement Meetings
Step 5 - Placement Review Meetings
Step 6 - Completion of Placement Process
Step 7 - Communication Sent Home to Parents

The Parent's Role In The Process

1. Revisit what you believe to be your child's learning style, strengths and weaknesses every year. It will help you to not only pinpoint the important aspects of your child but will help you to use the correct language when filling out forms or speaking with administrators.

2. Identify the best possible placement(s) using:
   - observation information (when applicable).
   - teacher interviews (if possible).
   - recommendation from the current year teacher.
   - recommendations from parents with students in that grade.

3. Fill out the Environmental Request Form or Parent Input Form. Submit it to the school office in a timely manner.

4. If these options do not exist in your school, consult with the current year teacher if you are confident that your child's teacher knows:
   - your child's learning style.
   - the next year's teachers well enough to make a good professional judgment.

Filling Out the Environmental Request Form or Parent Input Form

The Environmental Request Form or **Parent Input Form** is a tool for parents to voice their opinions regarding the educational environment and/or teaching strategies that work best for their child (See page 173 in the Appendix). More and more schools and districts are offering choices for programs and environments. The ultimate objective is to increase the probability that your child will be placed in the best learning environment.

Strategies For Filling Out ERF's or Parent Input Forms

When a check list of preferences is provided:

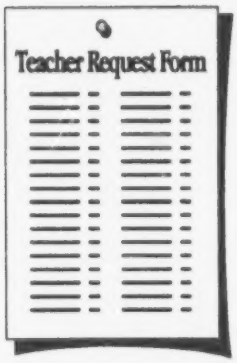
- Avoid checking items like "structure". Structure can be both positive and negative in its translation either referring to your child as unruly, in need of structure or highly motivated under a structured program.
- Be wary of items such as "requires a nurturing environment". No child should be placed in an "un-nurturing" environment. Some children need more adult interaction and feedback than others and that should be stated, not implied.
- Instead of using the method of checking boxes, write short narratives whenever possible in your own words.

Sample Statements For Environmental Request Forms

- My child's learning needs or academic goals for next year are:
- The conditions under which my child learns best are : **or**
- The best learning environment for my child includes:
- My child's social/emotional needs or goals for next year are:
- My child works best in a discipline structure that:
- Qualities that are specific and unique about my child include:

It is best to be knowledgeable about your child's learning needs through observations and feedback from teachers. Make periodic notes and review when answering these types of questions. (See **Understanding Your Child As A Learner)**

Filling Out The Teacher Request Forms



Some schools allow parents to recommend a teacher or teachers they feel would work best with their child. If your school does this they are probably using a separate form called a **Teacher Request Form**. It is not recommended that you rely on neighborhood gossip or hearsay to make this choice. When finding out about the prospective teachers, you may want to ask about the number of years of experience the teachers have, their training and/or continuing educational focus and their areas of specialization or curriculum areas they particularly enjoy teaching.

Strategies For Gathering Teacher Data

Attempt to get your own data on prospective teachers by:

- Interviewing the possible teachers or at least meeting them first.
- Observing in the classrooms.
- Asking your child's current teacher what she recommends if your child is remaining in that school.
- Reading the Teacher Bio's that appear in the school or classroom newsletters.
- Volunteering at the school or attending school events is another opportunity to see the teachers of other grade levels in action. Some examples of events include Technology Night, Science Fair, Art/Cultural Fair and Field Day.
- If you would like to get recommendations from other parents, be sure to ask probing questions to ascertain the reliability of their input. "Why do you recommend/not recommend that teacher?"

Sending Your Child On To Another School or District

If you ever move to another school or district, either in the area or to another state, you will want to inform the office as soon as possible. You will then be given a withdrawal slip which must be filled out. You will be given a copy of this form to take to your child's new school. These types of record transfers are critical to the process of keeping track of students within any state system.

The sooner you fill out the form, the sooner the office personnel can begin compiling the data on your child that will be sent to the new school. While you have the right to review your child's records at any time, the contents can only be sent at the request of someone at the new school. This is another reason to be sure to fill out the withdrawal slip and present your copy to the new school.

Sending Your Child To Middle Level School

Moving up to the middle school typically means communicating with many teachers, more administrators and, probably, the introduction of counselors. If you and your child have the chance to visit the school the year before, it is highly recommended. Many times a counselor from the Middle School comes to the elementary school classroom to fill students in on what they can expect. Ask if you can attend with the students. In any case you will want to know about:

- **Elective choices:** This includes any class that is not a requirement such as band, choir, industrial arts, physical education, drama, etc.
- **Scheduling options:** The times that core curriculum area subjects are taught, such as language arts and math and the times that electives are delivered may be critical to your child's ability to be successful. Ask if there is some flexibility in their schedules. Remember, this is one of the most difficult tasks of the administration and counselors at the school so tread lightly.

- **Honors testing:** Many schools offer honors classes to students who qualify by using teacher recommendations, testing or both. Find out what the requirements are and more about the program to determine if this is the best place for your child.

Strategies For Communicating In The Middle School

Meet your child's counselor and use this person as your primary contact. Let her know about anything you feel would be important for your child's teachers to know about your child to facilitate learning. Ask her if she would help you find the best way to communicate this to your child's teachers. If she says "Don't bother", it is recommended that you proceed to communicate this information on your own or talk to the principal if you are so inclined.

- **Meet all of your child's teachers** at the beginning of the school year so you will have met them prior to issues arising.

- **Talk to the teacher(s)** in which you have the most confidence when you are concerned about social or emotional issues about your child. Peer groups can be either supportive or detrimental to your child's ability to be successful in school. Open the lines of communication with trusted teachers and exchange information and strategies that work. If the situation warrants, ask for a meeting with all of your child's teachers and counselor to discuss your concerns.

- **Take issues about specific curriculum areas directly to that teacher** before discussing them with the counselor. If you don't get resolution from the teacher, you will then want to discuss this with your child's counselor.

- **Use the principal as a last resource** for issues.

Sending Your Child To High School

As your child graduates from Junior High School or Middle School, one of the biggest adventures of his school career will begin. Take a deep breath, however, because your job as a supportive parent has just picked up steam. Why? Because you now become your child's most effective guidance counselor. It is your guidance and support that will see your child through the final stage of their public schooling. Without you it is anyone's guess where your child will land.

Many High Schools are large, with upwards of 2,000 to 3,000 students. Counselors have anywhere from 300-500 students to "guide" through grades 9-12. These counselors tend to concentrate on the upper and lower 10% (a generous estimate). If your child is one of the approximately 80% who rarely, if ever, sees his guidance counselor, you should be wondering who is looking out to be sure your child is achieving their potential. The answer is **YOU**.

What are your best strategies for ensuring both you and your child clearly understand the expectations and opportunities before you? The following are from Faye Olderog, a guidance counselor at Red Mountain High School in the Mesa School District, Mesa Arizona:

Strategies For Communicating With The High School

- Attend any and all school functions for parents even before they enter High School.
- Read every communication that is sent home (most districts mail these).
- Address any concerns you have about your child's academics to the specific teacher of that subject area.
- Address any concerns you have about their social or emotional well-being to your child's counselor. Try to keep these visits to a minimum as these counselors have hundreds of students for whom they are responsible.

Strategies For Communicating With The H.S. (Cont.)

- If your child holds a job while in High School, try to limit the number of hours he works to no more than 20 per week. While the income may be a realistic necessity for some households, it could significantly reduce your child's ability to succeed academically and shrink the number of career choices available to your child after High School.

What You Need To Know To Ensure Success

- Know how many credits and which courses are required to graduate from High School.
- Know how many credits and which courses are required to be accepted into a State University.
- If you are interested in an out-of-state University, know what their admissions requirements are.
- If your child is interested in college, you may want to allow him to attend some community college classes if time allows during his junior and/or senior year.
- Take an interest in your child's circle of friends and discuss openly any concerns you have about his choices.
- Set the expectations and boundaries early and hold him to any consequences you have established just as you did when your child was younger.
- Compromise is critical. Try not to say "no". Instead, express your concerns about saying yes and give your child an opportunity to address your concerns.
- Attend as many concerts, athletic events, plays, etc. as possible even if your child is not in them.
- All students need to become keenly aware of career choices and opportunities at this age. Introduce your child to as many different careers as possible during these years and discuss how the choices he makes today will have an impact on his future.

Superintendent/District Communications

There are very few times, if any, when parents need to address the Superintendent of the school district. One way would be if you were asked to be a member of a district committee. The most common is if you have a concern that was not addressed to your satisfaction by school personnel. By the time you have taken a concern to the Superintendent of your district, you have hopefully exhausted every opportunity to resolve your issue at the school level.

If your concern is regarding a specific district-wide program or policy, you may want to consult with a district staff person in charge of this area first. If it is regarding a personnel issue, you may want to consult with an assistant superintendent in charge of certified (teachers) or classified (support staff) personnel.

Strategies For Approaching The District Superintendent

- Call ahead and make an appointment.
- Let the secretary know why you are requesting the meeting.
- Bring physical evidence, if applicable, to support your concern.
- Bring documentation of your attempt to address the issue at the school.
- Use the communication process described on page 60 in this section.
- Be respectful at all times.
- Try not to be too emotional; use logic and reasoning.
- Get agreement about the decision and who will be following up and when to review.
- Thank the superintendent for his time.
- Write a follow up letter to put the agreement in writing and to, once again, show your appreciation for his time.

Chain Of Command

Teacher - Always speak to your child's teacher(s) first about an issue unless your concern is the teacher's inability to address your concerns.

Principal - Talk to the principal if you have been unable to resolve an issue with the teacher or if you have an issue related to a school-wide practice.

Assistant Superintendent - Often there is a staff member at the district who is directly in charge of principals or district programs that would be the next in line in the chain of command. If it is a small district, however, it is likely you would go directly to the superintendent.

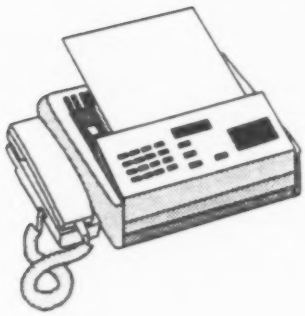
Superintendent - The superintendent is responsible for all operations of the district and is the director of all schools and district personnel. You would approach the superintendent directly for issues involving district management and operations (programs, budgets, policies, transportation, etc.)

School Board - Approach the school board as a group or individually regarding district policies, budgets, and appeals over the superintendent.

Roles and Responsibilities Of the Superintendent

- Direction and leadership of district organization.
- Strategic Planning.
- Oversight to budget development and financial planning.
- Shape vision and maintain focus.
- Oversight to curriculum development.
- Implementation of and adherence to Board policies.
- Oversight to human resource development and personnel selection/ evaluation.
- Labor relations related to both certified (teachers) and classified (support staff) personnel.
- Community relations.
- Media relations.
- Oversight of facility maintenance, improvement and life safety issues.
- Facilitator and problem solver.
- Supervision and direction of management team.
- Chief executive officer.

School Board Communications



The roles and responsibilities of your local school board are to:

1. Set policies.
2. Approve the budget.
3. Hire and fire the superintendent.

The rest is up to the district staff to accomplish. While there continues to be much controversy surrounding how deeply involved a school board should actually get into the workings of a district, these three components of these voluntary, elected positions remain constant.

Should you decide that you wish to take issue with a district policy, the budget or the superintendent, this is the place to speak your mind. You may wish to request that your issue be placed on the agenda at a formal board meeting or you may use an opportunity when the board has an agenda item that matches your concern. For example, the board must do a review of the superintendent on an annual basis. If you have a concern about the superintendent that you would like to make publicly, you may want to wait for this time of the year to make your statement. You will also want to keep track of the agenda each week to determine whether or not you wish to address the board about any issues that appear on the agenda.

Most community school boards are made up of hard working, intelligent individuals who, at times, go astray due to a lack of clear understanding about their roles and responsibilities defined by law. Find out what the laws are for your local school board and be sure these are followed. If you are so inclined to run for the board, do so with a clear understanding of your role as advocate for all students in the district, not just your child's school.

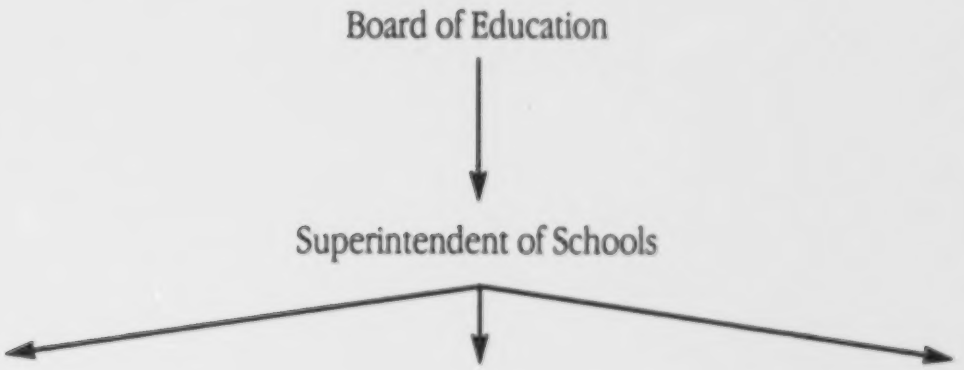
Strategies For Speaking Before The School Board

- Find out before the meeting what the procedure is for speaking before the School Board.
- It is highly recommended that you attend a couple of meetings first (physically or watch on the local cable station where available) to get acquainted with the system and workings of the board.
- When you are ready to speak, make sure you have notes with you or have what you want to say clearly written or outlined.
- Try not to make the same point over and over. If you are part of a group of people that are speaking about the same issue, give each person a different point to make so you are not all saying the same thing.
- It would be useful to understand the motives of each board member so you will not be blindsided. Find out why they ran, what they support and who their supporters are. Try to connect your issue to their "care abouts" in some way to enlist their support.

Strategies For Contacting Board Members Individually

You may also want to contact board members directly. Remember, the laws do not permit more than a quorum of board members to be together to discuss board issues without formal public notice. For this reason you will want to talk to only one or two at a time (based on a board with 5 members). The district should be willing to give out information about how to contact them either by phone or by mail. This provides an opportunity for you to go on record about your issue as well as possibly open a dialogue leading to alternatives you may not yet have considered.

District Organizational Chart
(Example)



Assistant Superintendent *	Assistant Superintendent *	Assistant Superintendent *
(Curriculum)	(Finance)	(Personnel)
Reading	Maintenance	Principals
Language Arts	Supplies	Assistant Principals
Mathematics	Accounting	Teachers
Science	Capital Funding	Building Staff
Social Studies		

Special Areas Curriculum
Special Area Teachers

*** The number and responsibilities of Assistant Superintendents are dependent upon the size and style of the district.**

Additional Resources

- Solve Your Child's School Related Problems by Michael Martin, Ph.D. and Cynthia Waltman-Greenwood, Ph.D., Harper Collins Publishers, 1995.

- The School Book by Mary Susan Miller, Ph.D., St Martin's Publishing, 1991.

- How To Get Your Child a Private School Education in the Public Schools by Martin Nemko, Ed.D., Ten Speed Press, 1989.

- Making the Best of Schools by Jeannie Oakes and Martin Lipton, Vail-Ballou Press, 1990.

- The Parents' Public School Handbook by Kenneth Shore, Ph.D., Simon and Schuster, 1994.

- Helping Your Child Succeed in Public School by Cheri Fuller, Focus on the Family Publishing, 1993.

- Getting the Best Education for Your Child by James Keogh, RGA Publishing, 1996.

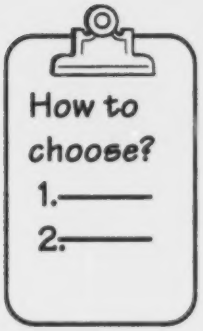
PART FOUR:

Finding The Right School

When my children started elementary school we sent them to the neighborhood school because it was our "assigned" school. Everyone else did the same thing. Then a few neighbors moved to be in a "better" school district. We moved for the same reason only to discover that the new school district was growing so rapidly, it would require our children to change schools every few years, thereby separating them from educational continuity as well as friendships.

Throughout the years we have explored traditional public schools, charter schools and private schools. Now we realize that sending a child to school involves decisions that must consider a wide number of available options. Parents need to define what they want in a school, explore the available options, then make a decision based upon their carefully considered exploration.

Why Choose ?

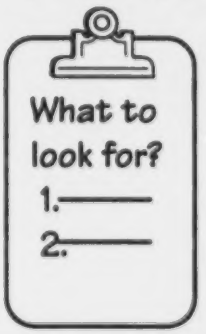


Although a public school has been assigned to your child based on his place of residence, it is your right as a parent to choose the school that is best suited to meet his educational needs. Would you even consider sending your child to a daycare where you had never toured the facility and met the administrator and/or caregivers? Of course not. Yet for generations parents naively sent their children off to schools they have never been in, where they have never met the staff let alone reviewed the curriculum, interviewed the principal, or questioned the school's credibility.

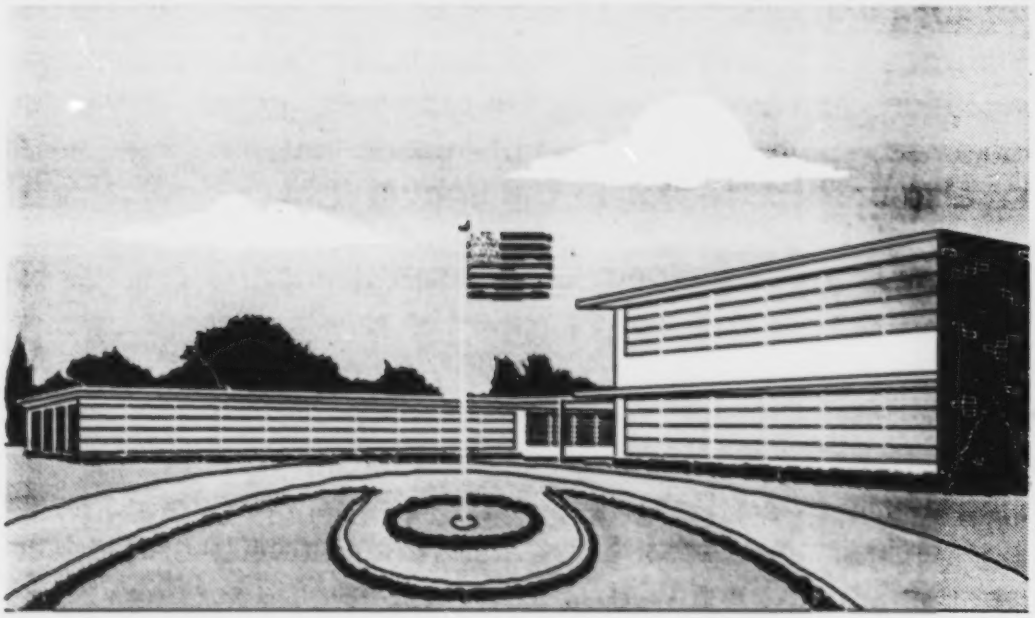
Why do we have blind faith in our education system? Probably because most of our parents did. More and more parents today, however, are recognizing their role as customers of public education making their right to choose where their children will go to school the most powerful playing card for change. So why should parents exercise their right to choose?

Because you can.

What does this look like? Think of yourself as a consumer of education. Just as you choose your car, your grocery store, your doctor and dentist, in the state of Arizona you are also entitled to **choose the school that best meets your child's academic, social, emotional and physical needs**. Since the publication of A Nation At Risk in 1994, we have seen the introduction of charter schools, back-to-basics schools and generally seen the choices for publicly funded education alternatives grow. Exercising your right to choose increases your child's chances of receiving a high quality of education because it forces school districts to take an introspective look at how well they are serving the public.



You may be looking for a home or the right kindergarten for your preschooler. Using effective tools to make this decision and prioritizing the important elements of the school and/or program that you choose are critical to achieving the results you want. Take the time to become familiar with the tools and strategies inside this book. Be clear about what you want for your child and make sure she gets it. Attempt to have a least three necessary criteria by which to make your decision. Avoid using only test scores to define the best choice. Some of the highest quality programs are inside socio-economically disadvantaged boundaries where test scores may be traditionally low. It is your right and your responsibility to make this a conscious choice on your part.



What Can You Expect From The School ?

The school must meet not only the academic needs of your child but the social, emotional and physical needs as well. This will look different in each environment no matter how "equitable" a district tries to be. Your child is a complicated combination of these elements which require attention during the school day.

Academic Needs

Academic needs are those typically related to reading, writing, mathematics, science and social studies. These are classroom studies usually with specific curriculum guidelines. The first three, traditionally called the 3 R's, tend to be the staple of academics while the other two may not have as great a focus. Finally, technology has become an important part of many districts' curriculum in recent years.

Social and Emotional Needs

Social needs are those that deal with how children relate to others such as their peers or adults. Emotional needs include anything having to do with a child's ability to appropriately deal with the world at large (feelings). The need for a child to be hugged and nurtured in the classroom (emotional) is different than the way the child interacts with others (social). While the two are closely intertwined, it is important to understand them separately.

Physical Needs

Finally, the physical needs of a child should be met within the physical education curriculum but it shouldn't end there. Children need to be able to use the bathroom when necessary, go to the nurse when appropriate and eat if they must go for prolonged periods between breakfast and lunch.

Who Is Your Child's Most Effective Advocate ?

YOU!

While it is your job as a parent to advocate for the needs of your child, it is the job of the teacher to advocate for all of his students and the principal's job to advocate for the needs of all the students at that school. A teacher and ultimately the school staff must balance the academic, social, emotional and physical needs of **all** students during the course of any given day's work which is obviously no small task.

ACADEMIC NEEDS

SOCIAL NEEDS

PARENT ⟶ CHILD
TEACHER ⟶ CLASS
PRINCIPAL ⟶ STUDENT BODY

PHYSICAL NEEDS

EMOTIONAL NEEDS

Where Do You Begin ?

Your Neighborhood or Boundary School

As long as the districting system is in place, we suggest that you first review the school that has been assigned to your child based on where you live. Make your best effort to see it as the school of choice for your child. Taking a critical look at the school within your boundaries will not only give you a good perspective of what you want but it will also provide a view of what the learning environment is like for your child's neighborhood friends. It may be that your philosophical boundaries have already narrowed your search exclusively to parochial or private schools. In this case it would still behoove you to gain perspective of your neighborhood/boundary school as it provides a baseline for establishing what you are actually getting for your additional financial contribution.

Become Part of The Solution

There are parents who have chosen their neighborhood school only to find that it had many inadequacies. Before making the decision to send your child to an alternative school, it is your responsibility to the other children in the community and to your own child to first weigh the possibility of becoming part of the solution. Many parents became more involved in the school as a volunteer to attempt to improve their concerns. This is a noble approach and in many cases it works. If, however, you find that the changes are too slow in coming to make a difference for your child or you find that you are being discouraged by parents who do not want to see such changes, then finding another environment would be prudent. (See How Do You Find Your Options? page 101)

Process For Reviewing Your Neighborhood School

1. **Identify your child's educational needs and learning style.**
   - See chapter titled Understanding Your Child as a Learner.

2. **Prepare a list of school elements that you feel are important elements.**
   - For a list of district elements see District Data Sheet in the Appendix
   - For a list of school elements see School Data Sheet in the Appendix

3. **Tour your neighborhood school.**
   - Form provided in the Workbook section

4. **Interview the principal.**
   - See Sample Questions Section for what to ask.

5. **Review the state-published school or district information.**
   - Obtain from the school or Department of Education

6. **Review the school policy handbook**
   - Obtain from the school.

7. **Keep notes in the Workbook Section under neighborhood school.**

[1]Decentralization is the dismantling of districts thus making each school a freestanding entity with a site council and administration that make decisions for the needs of their population of students free of district constraints and support.

[2] Vouchers are like coupons that you would get from the state to give to the educational institution of your choice. They represent public funds that the school would then receive for servicing your child.

How Do You Find Your Options ?

If the neighborhood school is not satisfactory for your child then your options for public and private schools may be overwhelming. Begin by establishing exactly what you would like from your school of choice.

5 Steps For Narrowing Your Options

1. Identify the elements of a school that are important to you.
2. Identify your boundaries.
3. Gather school data.
4. Familiarize yourself with types and labels for schools.
5. Choose the 2 or 3 schools you wish to visit.

1. **Look at the District and School Data Sheet in the APPENDIX and highlight all of the school elements you feel are important to your child's education.**

Some comments:

- If you are looking for smaller class size highlight **student/teacher ratio**

  CAUTION! Many schools take their number of students and divide by the number of certified teachers to get the teacher/student ratio. What you want is the number of students divided by the number of CLASSROOM teachers to know actual CLASS size.

- If you are looking for a high socio-economic area, look for **standardized test scores**, which may reflect a large number of high socio-economic students or look for **number of students on free and reduced lunch** which may reflect a large number of lower income students.

  CAUTION! Some of the best instruction and smallest class sizes exist in schools with socio-economically disadvantaged students. Don't let these figures stop you from exploring these environments.

- If you are looking for consistency and stability, highlight **teacher turnover**, **absenteeism for teachers**, **boundaries** and **rate of growth** for districts.

  CAUTION! Many districts are experiencing a large influx of students due to the growth here in the Phoenix Metropolitan area. This has caused some districts to change school boundaries every year which can be very disruptive to students who are forced to change schools during the course of their elementary and even high school education

2. **Identify where your own boundaries for choice exist.**

Your Child's Individual Learning Needs.

How does he learn and what do you, as a parent, expect from the school in order to meet those needs? We recommend reading Part 2, "Understanding Your Child as a Learner". This will give you great insight into not only how your child learns but how you can keep track of what they have learned. This is important to know when you are looking for just the right learning environment.

Your Financial Boundaries.

Can you pay tuition? Many parents rule out a category of tuition based schools due to the financial hardship it creates. Be aware that there are also many parents who, once having visited these schools, found a way to budget for this. Your child's education should be one of your highest priorities so if the best school for your child requires tuition, it is strongly recommended that you consider your options for financing. Many of these schools offer tuition scholarships for qualified families.

Your Geographical Boundaries.

How far can you drive them? Parents who are working tend to favor their neighborhood schools because transportation is provided. If you discover that the best school requires that you transport your child, ask the school staff about car pools or other options for transportation. Typically your options will be limited to schools that are on the way to work or near your place of employment but don't let this become the biggest obstacle.

Your Educational Beliefs.

What are your beliefs about how your child should learn (see **Educational Belief Systems** in the GLOSSARY OF TERMS). Do you want an environment, perhaps, like the one you learned in years ago (Academic Rationalist) or do you want something different (Self-Actualizer for example)? Be open minded to the various types of learning environments that exist because there are more than ever before. Clearly understand your child's learning style and keep that in mind as well.

3. **Gather your school data from the following resources.**

The State Department of Education

If you are beginning from scratch, the state can provide a list of all district and charter schools, if applicable.

Districts

Call the State Department of Education for a list of districts statewide and their phone numbers. When you contact the district office ask for the community relations department and request a packet of information about the district. Check the District Data Sheet on page 176 in the Appendix for elements of a district you may want to know about.

Parent Referrals

It's a good idea to get parent recommendations for schools but be cautious! This is another parent's perspective of a school. Always keep this in mind when using parent referrals. Many charter and private schools will have a list of parents you can call for a reference.

4. **Familiarize yourself with the Types and Labels for schools**

If you live in a large metropolitan area you may find that your list of choices is overwhelming so the first thing you'll want to do is understand what you might find.

Types Of Schools

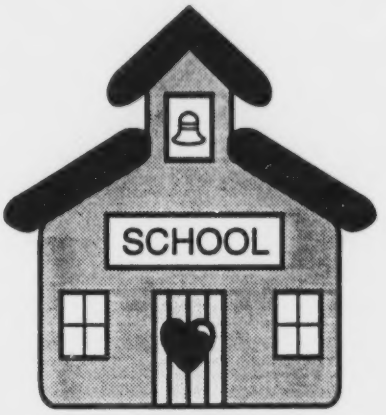
Review the categories of schools listed under "**Types of Schools**" in the Glossary of Terms and identify the types that fall within your financial and/or philosophical boundaries.

Labels For Schools

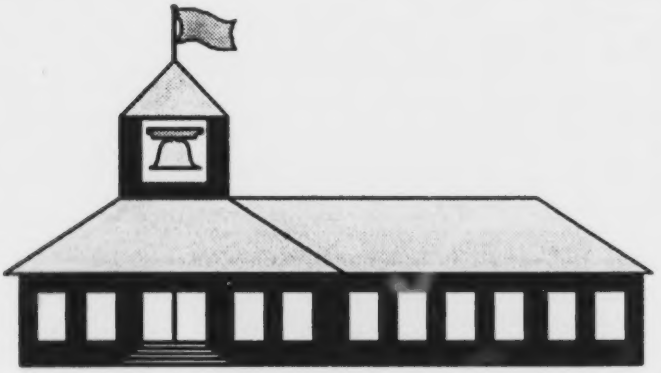
You will then want to review "**Labels for Schools**" also found in the GLOSSARY OF TERMS in case you run into one that has a specific philosophy or curriculum objective. Many districts have a "school within a school" program which offers some of the choices you find under Labels for Schools but inside a district school. The District office will be able to inform you as to what programs exist within their schools.

5. **Choose two to three schools that, to the best of your knowledge, fit within your boundaries and contain the elements high-lighted on the School and/or District Data Sheets. List them on the appropriate pages in the WORKBOOK.**

PAROCHIAL



CHARTER



PRIVATE

How Do You Review Your Options ?

Now that you have narrowed your options to 2 or 3, you are ready to visit and review each site. We strongly recommend that you take the approach that you are gaining your own personal perspective of a given school rather than evaluating it. This is based on the idea that you are gathering information and data based on what is important to you and your child's learning needs. The results of your search then will be owned by you as a parent and will not necessarily be adequate for use by other parents.

Process For Reviewing Your Options

1. Review the Policy Handbook and other school information

Call the school and ask for the School Policy Handbook and any other information they can provide. These documents will provide valuable information that you can obtain *prior* to entering the school. If you have chosen a charter, private or parochial school see **What you need to know about Charter Schools and Private and Parochial Schools** in the FYI section, page 108.

2. Interview the Principal

Call the school and let the secretary know you would like to set up a time to speak with the principal about enrolling your child. Try to do this between the months of October through April. Let them know it will require half an hour to an hour of the principal's time and you would also like to have a tour of the facility while you are there.

A principal's job could be anything from facility manager (usually in bigger middle and high schools) to hands-on administrator who is regularly engaged in student activities (typically elementary school). You are there to "get a feel" for the school and the system under which it runs.

- What is the principal's leadership style?

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Process For Reviewing Your Options (cont.)

A list of **Sample questions for the principal** can be found in the **Sample Question Section**. A **Principal Interview Notes** page is provided with each school option in the workbook.

- Are the teachers qualified and quality? (See **What makes a quality teacher?** in the FYI section).

3. Tour the Facility

School buildings have many different looks. Your primary concern should be how safe and properly maintained the building is. Then move on to what the facility offers to students and teachers in the way of environmental amenities.

Fill out the **School Tour Sheet** found in each school option form in the Workbook to document other aspects of the facility that you may want to remark upon.

4. Interview teachers and observe in classrooms

If you are fortunate enough to be able to interview a couple of teachers, the **Sample questions for teacher interviews** are found in the Sample Questions section for your convenience. If you are allowed to observe in the classroom, you may want to review the list of various **Teaching Strategies** found in the **Glossary of Terms**. Many teachers will use these terms to describe how they approach the learning process within their classrooms. In lieu of this, at the high school level, some schools will allow your child to "shadow" another student for a day. Your child then has the opportunity to contribute her own perspective as well.

5. Fill out Workbook Forms for each school

Finally, fill out the forms in the Workbook while you are going through this process. Make your choice based on how each school performed on each of your prioritized elements as well as your "gut feeling" about the school. Remember you will have to develop a relationship with the school and be confident the staff will be able to meet your child's learning needs.

6. Make your choice and become involved

Your job as a parent does not end when you have chosen a school. Organizing your home so your children can be successful, monitoring and documenting the depth and breadth of your child's learning, communicating with your child's teacher(s) and supporting the school to the best of your ability are crucial to your child's success in school. We recommend our other books listed at the end of this chapter.

How Long Is Your Commitment To The School And When Should You Begin Looking ?

Elementary grades K-5 or K-6

Begin researching schools at least a year prior to enrollment with the goal of making a decision that will last at least **3 years** for elementary grades. Children, especially small ones, generally thrive in a comfortable, familiar environment.

Middle School and Junior High School Years*

If you are choosing a middle school or junior high school, you might begin looking while your child is still in elementary school as many charter and private school options begin in fourth grade (considered to be intermediate) or earlier. It may be difficult to move your child into some charter or private schools at the middle or junior high school level because these classes are filled with students who have been attending since their elementary years.

High School Years

Some districts require the student to have a specific reason for transferring to another high school within their district if the school is at capacity, such as an intramural sport or an academic focus not offered at their boundary school.

***What is the difference between middle school and junior high**

Junior High Schools teach 7th and 8th or 7th-9th grade and tend to treat their students more like High School students with a different teacher for every subject. Middle Schools usually service 6th-8th grade and tend to recognize and attend to the students emotional and social needs more readily by offering such options as classrooms with one teacher for all subjects. These will vary considerably between districts and schools so don't rule anything out until you have seen the school.

FYI - What You Need to Know About:
Charter Schools

Charter schools are publicly funded schools that operate independent of districts. If you are looking at a charter school see the Charter School Questions listed in the Sample Questions Section. These answers will help you to understand what the school is chartered to do and clarify your role as a parent. One of the most important questions is who the school is chartered by: A State Board of Education, a State Charter School Board, or a district Board of Education. The process for obtaining a charter under each of these entities differs. For more general information about charter schools call the Center for Education Reform at (202) 822-9000 or see their Web Site at www.edreform.com.

Private and Parochial Schools

These tuition-based options will vary considerably across any community. Each should have curriculum and instructional guidelines. Parochial schools, however, will have a religious or secular focus. You will want to find out what that is and how it is integrated into the curriculum and instruction. Review this area in the Sample Questions Section.

Tuition-based private schools will also have a particular "focus". Some of these private schools have companies or corporations sponsoring them and/or may own other schools around the country similar to a chain of stores. You may want to find out more about their financial backing.

What Makes A Quality Teacher ?

- Knowledge of the subjects they teach.
- Diagnostic and planning skills.
- Organization and management techniques.
- An understanding of how children develop and learn.
- A variety of ways to present information and to develop students' thinking.
- The ability and knowledge to make valid evaluations of student learning.
- A willingness to participate in life long professional growth.
- The capacity to make judgements about the effects of particular teaching practices on individual students' learning.
- The ability to partner with parents; invite their input and respect their role.

Sample Questions

Sample Questions For Principal Interviews

- Do you have the school's mission, philosophy, goals and objectives published?
- Is there a formal curriculum? Ask to see it.
- Is there a Criterion Reference Test (CRT) that you use to assess student performance against that curriculum?
- What are your homework policies? (also in the Handbook)
- How may parents give input in choosing their child's teachers?
- How may parents observe the teachers and/or classrooms before enrolling a child or to make a placement choice for the following year?
- How may parents interview teachers?
- Do teachers "ability group" for key subject areas such as math and reading? In what way(s)?
- What extra-curricular activities does the school offer?
- What is the ratio of classroom teachers per student? Average class size?
- In what ways are parents involved at the school?
- What are the responsibilities of the site-based council? Are parents welcome at the meetings?
- Is there a school improvement plan? Ask to see it.
- Is there a counselor at this school?
- Please *clarify* your policies regarding homework, safety, discipline, (any others you feel are important).
- On average, how long does a teacher teach in this school?
- How are your special education and gifted classes taught? Inclusion, pullout, or consultative?
- What kinds of before/after school programs are available?
- Are there any anticipated changes regarding facilities, capacity or boundaries?
- Do you publish parent newsletters? (Ask for copy of the last two or three).
- Do you offer non-graded groupings of children?

Sample Questions Specific To Charter Schools

Besides the list of questions for the principal, you may want to add these questions to your list when interviewing a charter school principal.

- Who is chartering your school? State Board of Education, State Charter School Board or a School District?
- What is your special emphasis?
- How long have you been up and running?
- What are the qualifications of the director/principal?
- What are the qualifications of your staff?
- Are you non-profit or for profit?
- If non-profit, who sits on your board of directors?
- Are all of your teachers state certified?
- What special programs and extracurricular activities are offered? Music, Physical Education, Art, Clubs/Organizations.
- How many students are currently enrolled?
- What are the future plans for expanding the facilities, equipment, staff?
- How is funding allocated across the facility, equipment, administration, staff?

Sample Questions Specific To Parochial and/or Private Schools

- What is your religious affiliation and/or educational philosophy?
- Where does your funding come from?
- What are the expectations for parent involvement?
- Are your teachers state certified?
- How many teachers do you have at each grade level? *

* It's a good idea to have at least two choices because personality conflicts between teachers and students can be very damaging.

Sample Questions For Teacher Interviews

The Process

1. Have your questions prepared.
2. Introduce yourself.
3. Tell the teacher how you support your child at home.
4. Ask your questions.
5. Ask the teacher if they have any questions.

Questions

The 3 Key Questions

- How will you know what my child knows and doesn't know?
- How will you address what he/she doesn't know?
- Why will you take that approach?

- How long have you been teaching?
- What grades have you taught and where?
- What are your goals for your class?
- What tools do you use to assess your students?
- What is your approach to discipline?
- What are your expectations for parent involvement?
- Do you have an area of the curriculum in which you specialize?
- Give me an example of how you individualize instruction?
- How do you involve your students in their learning?
- How do you encourage critical thinking in your students?
- Give me an example of how you stimulate love of learning in your students. How do you encourage excitement for learning?
- What other qualities would you like to tell me about with regards to your teaching?

Workbooks

Your Visit To Your Neighborhood School

School District: _____

School Name: _____

Grades served: _____ Number of Students: _____

School Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Principal: _____ # of Years at School: _____

# of Classroom Teachers: ____ Web site: _____

☐ Reviewed the School Policy Handbook

☐ Reviewed the State School Report Card

☐ Interviewed/some teacher(s) ☐ Observed the classroom

☐ Visited the facility ☐ Interviewed the Principal

TOP 3 ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED:

_____

_____

_____

NOTES:

Tour Of Neighborhood School

Visit the following:

Front Office
- ☐ # of Administrators
- ☐ Sign-In Procedure
- ☐ Secure
- ☐ Welcoming

Computer Lab/Technology
- ☐ # of Administrators
- ☐ Sign-In Procedure
- ☐ Secure
- ☐ Welcoming

Gym
- ☐ Hardwood Floors
- ☐ Equipment for P.E.
- ☐ P.E. taught inside or out?

Music Room
- ☐ Stage
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Piano
- ☐ Technology integration

NOTES:

Playground
- ☐ Ramadas
- ☐ Open Fields
- ☐ Primary and Intermediate Equipment

Library
- ☐ # of Books
- ☐ # of Staff
- ☐ Computerized inventory

Art Room
- ☐ Full-Time Teacher
- ☐ Part-Time Teacher
- ☐ Adequate supplies
- ☐ What grades receive art instruction?

Health Office
- ☐ Full-Time Nurse
- ☐ Part-Time Nurse

Lunch Room
- ☐ Tables and benches
- ☐ Kitchen

Classrooms

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Linoleum
- ☐ Carpet
- ☐ Desks
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Black board
- ☐ White board
- ☐ Student Tables
- ☐ Computer(s)
- ☐ Displayed Work
- ☐ Actively involved Students
- ☐ Student Products show use of computer

Classrooms Observations

Lighting

- ☐ Skylights
- ☐ Florescent Lights
- ☐ Windows

Seating

- ☐ Desks in rows
- ☐ Desks in groups
- ☐ Tables
- ☐ Couch(es)
- ☐ Beanbag Chairs
- ☐ Solitary Desk

Centers

- ☐ Based on current instruction
- ☐ Hands-on activities
- ☐ Lots of Paper Products

Boards

- ☐ Student Products
- ☐ Teacher-made
- ☐ Visually Stimulating

Classroom Design

- ☐ Teacher's desk faces students
- ☐ Teacher's desk faces wall
- ☐ Students face board
- ☐ Students face teacher's desk
- ☐ Breakout area

Teacher

- ☐ Discipline plan clearly displayed
- ☐ Positive student interaction
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Students actively engaged

NOTES:

Notes From Principal and Teacher Interviews - Neighborhood School

Your Visit to School Option "A"

☐ Charter ☐ Private ☐ Parochial ☐ District

School Name: _____

School Focus: _____

Grades served: _____ Number of Students: _____

School Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Principal: _____ # of Years at School: _____

# of Classroom Teachers: _____ Web Site: _____

Chartered by: _____ (if applicable)

☐ Reviewed the School Policy Handbook

☐ Reviewed the State School Report Card

☐ Interviewed teacher(s)

☐ Visited the facility ☐ Interviewed the principal

☐ Observed a classroom

TOP 3 ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED:

_____

_____

NOTES:

Tour of School Option "A"

Visit the following:

Front Office

- ☐ # of Admins _____
- ☐ Sign-In Procedure
- ☐ Secure
- ☐ Welcoming

Computer Lab/Technology

- ☐ # of Computers _____
- ☐ Video
- ☐ LCD Panels
- ☐ Internet Access

Gym

- ☐ Hardwood Floors
- ☐ Equipment for P.E.
- ☐ P.E. taught inside or out?

Music Room

- ☐ Stage
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Piano
- ☐ Technology integration

Playground

- ☐ Ramadas
- ☐ Open Fields
- ☐ Primary and Intermediate Equipment

Library

- ☐ # of Books
- ☐ # of Staff
- ☐ Computerized inventory

Art Room

- ☐ Full-Time Teacher
- ☐ Part-Time Teacher
- ☐ Adequate supplies
- ☐ What grades receive art instruction?

Health Office

- ☐ Full-Time Nurse
- ☐ Part-Time Nurse

Lunch Room

- ☐ Tables and benches
- ☐ Kitchen

NOTES:

Classrooms

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Linoleum
- ☐ Carpet
- ☐ Desks
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Black board
- ☐ White board
- ☐ Student Tables
- ☐ Computer(s)
- ☐ Displayed Work
- ☐ Actively involved Students
- ☐ Student Products show use of computer

Classroom Observations

Lighting

- ☐ Skylights
- ☐ Florescent Lights
- ☐ Windows

Seating

- ☐ Desks in rows
- ☐ Desks in groups
- ☐ Tables
- ☐ Couch(es)
- ☐ Beanbag Chairs
- ☐ Solitary Desk

Centers

- ☐ Based on current instruction
- ☐ Hands-on activities
- ☐ Lots of Paper Products

Boards

- ☐ Student Products
- ☐ Teacher-made
- ☐ Visually Stimulating

Classroom Design

- ☐ Teacher's desk faces students
- ☐ Teacher's desk faces wall
- ☐ Students face board
- ☐ Students face teacher's desk
- ☐ Breakout area

Teacher

- ☐ Discipline plan clearly displayed
- ☐ Positive student interaction
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Students actively engaged

NOTES:

Notes From Principal and Teacher Interviews - Option "A"

Your Visit to School Option "B"

☐ Charter ☐ Private ☐ Parochial ☐ District

School Name: _____

School Focus: _____

Grades served: _____ Number of Students: _____

School Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Principal: _____ # of Years at School: _____

# of Classroom Teachers: _____ Web Site: _____

Chartered by: _____ (if applicable)

☐ Reviewed the School Policy Handbook

☐ Reviewed the State School Report Card

☐ Interviewed teacher(s)

☐ Visited the facility ☐ Interviewed the principal

☐ Observed a classroom

TOP 3 ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED:

_____

_____

_____

NOTES:

Tour of School Option "B"

Visit the following:

Front Office

- ☐ # of Admins _____
- ☐ Sign-In Procedure
- ☐ Secure
- ☐ Welcoming

Computer Lab/Technology

- ☐ # of Computers _____
- ☐ Video
- ☐ LCD Panels
- ☐ Internet Access

Gym

- ☐ Hardwood Floors
- ☐ Equipment for P.E.
- ☐ P.E. taught inside or out?

Music Room

- ☐ Stage
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Piano
- ☐ Technology integration

Playground

- ☐ Ramadas
- ☐ Open Fields
- ☐ Primary and Intermediate Equipment

Library

- ☐ # of Books
- ☐ # of Staff
- ☐ Computerized inventory

Art Room

- ☐ Full-Time Teacher
- ☐ Part-Time Teacher
- ☐ Adequate supplies
- ☐ What grades receive art instruction?

Health Office

- ☐ Full-Time Nurse
- ☐ Part-Time Nurse

Lunch Room

- ☐ Tables and benches
- ☐ Kitchen

NOTES:

Classrooms

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Linoleum
- ☐ Carpet
- ☐ Desks
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Black board
- ☐ White board
- ☐ Student Tables
- ☐ Computer(s)
- ☐ Displayed Work
- ☐ Actively involved Students
- ☐ Student Products show use of computer

Classroom Observations

Lighting

- ☐ Skylights
- ☐ Florescent Lights
- ☐ Windows

Seating

- ☐ Desks in rows
- ☐ Desks in groups
- ☐ Tables
- ☐ Couch(es)
- ☐ Beanbag Chairs
- ☐ Solitary Desk

Centers

- ☐ Based on current instruction
- ☐ Hands-on activities
- ☐ Lots of Paper Products

Boards

- ☐ Student Products
- ☐ Teacher-made
- ☐ Visually Stimulating

Classroom Design

- ☐ Teacher's desk faces students
- ☐ Teacher's desk faces wall
- ☐ Students face board
- ☐ Students face teacher's desk
- ☐ Breakout area

Teacher

- ☐ Discipline plan clearly displayed
- ☐ Positive student interaction
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Students actively engaged

NOTES:

Notes From Principal and Teacher Interviews - Option "B"

Your Visit to School Option "C"

☐ Charter ☐ Private ☐ Parochial ☐ District

School Name: _____

School Focus: _____

Grades served: _____ Number of Students: _____

School Address: _____

City: _____ Zip: _____ Phone: _____

Principal: _____ # of Years at School: _____

# of Classroom Teachers: _____ Web Site: _____

Chartered by: _____ (if applicable)

☐ Reviewed the School Policy Handbook
☐ Reviewed the State School Report Card
☐ Interviewed teacher(s)
☐ Visited the facility ☐ Interviewed the principal
☐ Observed a classroom

TOP 3 ELEMENTS TO BE CONSIDERED:

_____

_____

_____

NOTES:

Tour of School Option "C"

Visit the following:

Front Office

- ☐ # of Admins _____
- ☐ Sign-In Procedure
- ☐ Secure
- ☐ Welcoming

Computer Lab/Technology

- ☐ # of Computers _____
- ☐ Video
- ☐ LCD Panels
- ☐ Internet Access

Gym

- ☐ Hardwood Floors
- ☐ Equipment for P.E.
- ☐ P.E. taught inside or out?

Music Room

- ☐ Stage
- ☐ Instruments
- ☐ Piano
- ☐ Technology integration

Playground

- ☐ Ramadas
- ☐ Open Fields
- ☐ Primary and Intermediate Equipment

Library

- ☐ # of Books
- ☐ # of Staff
- ☐ Computerized inventory

Art Room

- ☐ Full-Time Teacher
- ☐ Part-Time Teacher
- ☐ Adequate supplies
- ☐ What grades receive art instruction?

Health Office

- ☐ Full-Time Nurse
- ☐ Part-Time Nurse

Lunch Room

- ☐ Tables and benches
- ☐ Kitchen

NOTES:

Classrooms

- ☐ Phone
- ☐ Linoleum
- ☐ Carpet
- ☐ Desks
- ☐ Television
- ☐ Black board
- ☐ White board
- ☐ Student Tables
- ☐ Computer(s)
- ☐ Displayed Work
- ☐ Actively involved Students
- ☐ Student Products show use of computer

Classroom Observations

Lighting

- ☐ Skylights
- ☐ Florescent Lights
- ☐ Windows

Seating

- ☐ Desks in rows
- ☐ Desks in groups
- ☐ Tables
- ☐ Couch(es)
- ☐ Beanbag Chairs
- ☐ Solitary Desk

Centers

- ☐ Based on current instruction
- ☐ Hands-on activities
- ☐ Lots of Paper Products

Boards

- ☐ Student Products
- ☐ Teacher-made
- ☐ Visually Stimulating

Classroom Design

- ☐ Teacher's desk faces students
- ☐ Teacher's desk faces wall
- ☐ Students face board
- ☐ Students face teacher's desk
- ☐ Breakout area

Teacher

- ☐ Discipline plan clearly displayed
- ☐ Positive student interaction
- ☐ Fun
- ☐ Organized
- ☐ Students actively engaged

NOTES:

Notes From Principal and Teacher Interviews - Option "C"

Additional Resources

- The Parents Public School Handbook by Kenneth Shore, Ph.D., Simon & Schuster, 1994
- How To Get Your Child a Private School Education in the Public Schools by Martin Nemko, Ed.D., Ten Speed Press, 1989.
- How to Give Your Child An Excellent Public School Education by Susan Mansell, Citadel Press, 1998.
- Beyond the Classroom by Laurence Steinberg, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

PART FIVE:

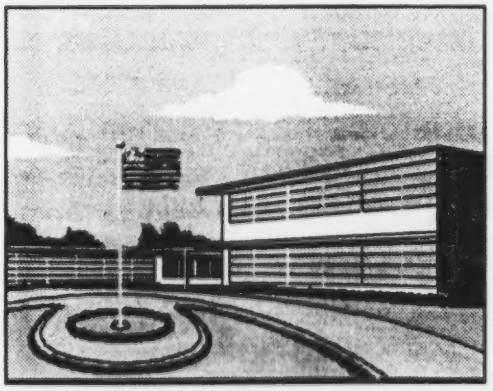
Supporting Your Child's School

I often use the "Frog in Boiling Water" analogy when I discuss the education system in the United States. A frog, if thrown into a pot of boiling water, will leap out and save himself. If, however, you put a frog in a pot of lukewarm water and turn up the heat, he will sit in the water until he meets his fate, unable to perceive the danger he is in. Education has evolved like the second frog. Compared to 40 years ago, more and more cities, companies, schools, teachers and parents are operating in isolation from each other. In most areas, teachers do not know the workforce needs of their community, the family needs of their students or even what innovative, successful strategies other teachers, schools and districts are using. Parents are either too involved, involved with only fundraising or not involved at all. Schools are under more pressure for accountability with stretched resources. They find it necessary to go beyond teaching the basics to providing all kinds of services to children and families. Children have less time to learn in a world that requires them to think better. This predicament is not for the education system alone to fix. Parents, communities and local businesses need to take part in saving the "frog" from its fate.

Why Support?

Children do not come to school alone. Surrounding that child every day is a family who belongs to an entire community consisting of many different business, religious, and public entities. They can have a very strong affect on a child's opportunities both positive and negative. The more schools can pro-actively open their doors to these entities and take them on as full partners, the more likely it is that the affect will be positive.

Wouldn't it be great if students came to school every day with a clear understanding of the value of their education as it translates to their future opportunities? Studies show that students whose parents value education do better in school no matter what the ethnic, racial, or socioeconomic background may be. These parents are providing their children with the motivation they need to succeed. Motivation is a difficult task and even the most successful businesses today struggle to find ways to motivate their employees. Sometimes parents share this with their children but when they don't students can still be motivated by intrinsic and extrinsic rewards for their efforts. Business and community partnerships can fill this gap.



Any principal, teacher and/or secretary will tell you, however, that it takes an enormous amount of time to develop the relationships with these people in order for them to work for you instead of against you. Parent volunteers, in any school, who are specifically designated to be of assistance in the development of these partnerships can significantly increase the level of education for all children in the school and the quality of the instructional environment for teachers!

Ways To Support Your Child's School

There are endless support systems in the community from which any school may draw. They usually fall into three categories; parental support, business support and community support. While any school can benefit from all three, most schools attempt to obtain parental support first and use business and community support systems to either make up for a lack of parental support or to strengthen parental support.

Parental support may encompass anything from sending a child to school ready to learn to actually having parents participate in classroom learning activities as will be discussed further later in this chapter. Some parents will show a tremendous amount of support for education at home even though they never step foot in the school. Other parents take time to volunteer and/or work in their child's school on a regular basis to the benefit of more than just their own child. In the end, the message parents must give their children is that education is important!

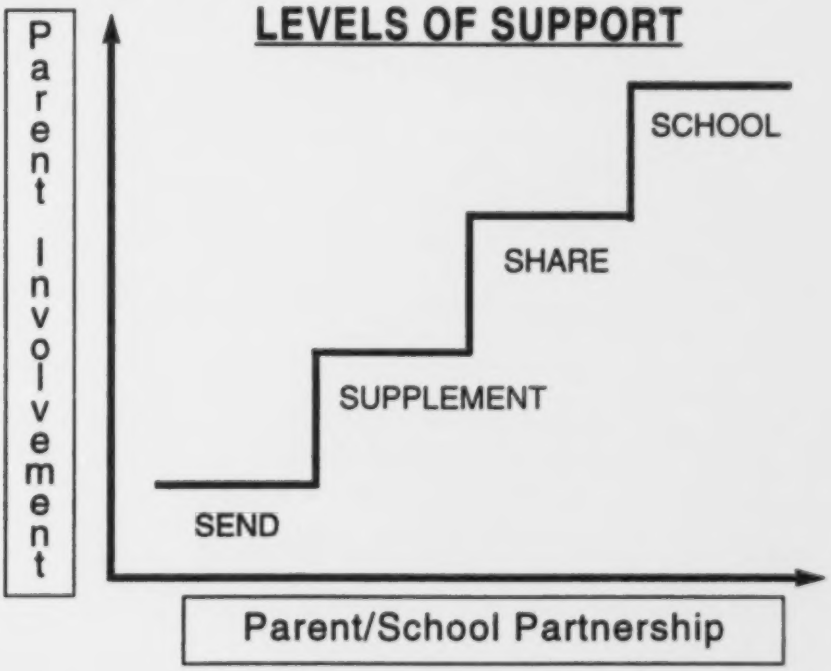
When parental support is either negligible, or non-existent at the school site, some school staff members turn to **businesses** in the area for support. The climate for business support for education has never been better. As work-force needs continue to grow for all businesses, they are recognizing their role in "feeding the funnel" of workers. Business employees and money cannot take the place of parents but they can enhance many curriculum objectives by assisting teachers in giving the learning a real world twist or relevancy.

Community agencies and organizations have many support systems to offer. Teachers with students who have family issues and/or individual learning needs tend to try to take care of these issues within the confines of their classroom. But for many of these concerns, there are community programs and resources

that can be of assistance. Schools should also explore the idea that students need the opportunity to be able to give back to their community through a community service project to demonstrate a level of being connected and embraced by their community.

Parent Partnerships - The Parent Perspective

One way to look at parent involvement or parent partnerships is by using a tiered viewpoint to show Levels of Support. Each level is important to the partnership between parents and schools and the more involvement there is, the stronger the partnership, even elevating it to the point where the parents ARE the educators.



SEND

Sending your child to school ready to learn is the most basic form of support parents can show for their child's education. Even if the parent never steps foot in the school, they can and should make sure their child's basic needs are met. What does this include?

Beyond Basic Needs

Sending children to school ready to learn includes needs other than basic physical needs. Here are some tips for making sure your child is positively "engaged" in their learning and you, the parent, are positively "engaged" in their lives.

Help your child set goals

Children learn more and retain better when they are part of the process. The more they know about what they need to accomplish, the more motivated they will be. Start with short-term academic, social, and/or emotional goals that can be reviewed/revised quarterly. Then establish long-term yearly and career goals that help them visualize their future.

Expose your child to various career opportunities

Children see teaching modeled every day as a career opportunity. Your child may even know and have spent some time with you, the parent, at work. The truth is, many children are not necessarily suited to the same career path as their parents. Give your child a chance to shadow potential careers that interest her. Take advantage of vacations or events such as Take Your Daughter/Son to Work Day and Groundhog Job Shadow Day to expose your child to careers that match their interests and abilities.

Get to know their friends

Parents need to know who their children are hanging around even through, and especially in high school. This way you will know the kinds of messages that are being given your child regularly and you will be able to recognize those who represent new influences on your child. Peer pressure is a powerful thing not to be taken for granted.

Show support for their activities

We all lead busy lives and it seems to get more difficult to be everywhere you need to be but kids notice when parents don't attend their events. Go to every event that you are invited to by your child. No child ever wished their parent had not attended their play, game or performance.

Spend individual time with your child

Parents tend to believe that once children get into the middle grades, they require less parental supervision and attention. most schools encourage this belief by making their schools less parent friendly in the middle and high schools. Schedule time with your child no matter what age. Take turns going to events that you like and those that interest her.

Basic Needs

- Getting plenty of seep
- Having safe and secure shelter
- Getting regular medical checkups and immunizations
- Eating nourishing food
- Having suitable clothing
- Having responsible childcare
- Having needed school supplies
- Having transportation to and from school

SUPPLEMENT at home

After meeting your child's basic needs, there are things you can do at home to support their education and specifically their teacher(s). Supporting your child's education at home beyond the basics includes:

• Establish guidelines for social behavior • Providing a sense of values/ morality • Setting up an organized environment • Asking your child about school (see the box) • Establishing a regular reading time and reading to your child	• Reading everything that comes home from school • Speaking positively about school • Visiting the school at least once a year • Organizing and monitoring homework • Knowing the names of your child's teacher(s) and principal

Questions To Ask Your Child About School

- Show me something you learned in math (reading or writing) today.
- How do you feel about your teacher?
- What was your favorite part of your day today? Why?
- Why do you think your teacher gave you this assignment?
- Why? What? How? They are your best openers.

SUPPLEMENT at school

Supporting your child's education at school means actually going to the school for an event or activity specific to your child's education. First attend everything you possibly can. This shows you care. Even high school students like to have their parents attend their plays, ball games and special school events. Beyond this, volunteer to do something for the school. While the PTO/PTA is a good place to start, you may want to tailor your volunteerism. No matter how small it is, it will make a difference. Finally, you can make a difference by sponsoring or funding a specific program/project.

Attend

• All Events and Fairs	• The Meet the Teacher Night
• All Parent Conferences	• Any PTA/PTO Meetings*
• The Open House	• The Curriculum Night

Volunteer

- For Committees
- In the Classroom
- In the Library/Media Center
- For the Site-Based Council
- In the Fine Arts Programs
- For the PTO/PTA
- To Take Pictures
- In the Computer Lab
- To Video Tape a Program

Sponsor

- Provide funds for the classroom teacher.
- Donate supplies/equipment.
- Establish and give to community foundations.
- Ask your place of employment if they have a corporate program for giving to education.
- Support fund-raising events.
- Make an in-kind contribution.
- Make a charitable bequest.

*About PTO and PTA

There is a difference between a Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and a Parent Teacher Association (PTA). A PTO, also called Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) or Family Teacher Organization (FT), is an independent group with no ties to a national organization and typically is not formally registered in any way. Their main purpose, in most cases, is fund-raising but they may also coordinate parent volunteers in the school. The Parent Teacher Association (PTA), however, is a dues-paying member of the National PTA. Their board members are bonded and all members pay minimal dues. These organizations are typically fund-raising bodies but may also take on some of the national initiatives such as parent volunteerism and business partnerships.

SHARE

Sharing is the responsibility of educating your child means partnering with your child's teacher(s) in a collaborative way. The parent becomes an advocate, monitor and tracker of progress. This usually means taking the time to either assist in the teaching of your child, like working on math facts at home, or hiring another professional to assist, such as hiring a tutor. In any case, it is not necessarily saying that the instruction is not working in the classroom, but simply that your child could use more time and resources for working on these particular skills. Even the parent of the brightest students share this responsibility to some extent.

It is important for parents to know two (2) things related to their learning if they wish to share the responsibility. First, know your child's learning style. Are they auditory, visual, or kinesthetic learners? This will help you decide what kinds of academic activities will work best for them. Refer to Part 2 Understanding Your Child as a Learner. Second, have a clear understanding of the curriculum objectives. Make sure your child is working toward mastering appropriate grade level skills and/or are not jumping over important curriculum objectives.

SCHOOL

Many parents choose to set up educational environments and activities at home that compliment what the school system provides. Engaging your child in learning at home can be fun and not only will enhance their learning but also keep them away from non-learning activities such as certain television shows and computer games. Supplemental learning strategies are outlined in Part 1 Organizing Your Home For Success.

Some parents feel so deeply about the way in which they feel their child should be educated that they choose to BE the system. Home-schooling has been growing in popularity over the past 10 years for various reasons. Some children's learning

needs are so great that one-on-one is the only way the parent feels their child can be successful. Other parents home-school so they can ensure the education has the appropriate religious focus. Whatever their reasons, parents who home-school their children are a growing group. There are support systems for families to do this in every community.

Home-schooling is not for everyone but there are some important points to consider. Students tend to do better academically when home-schooled. This is not such a big surprise when you consider the impact individualized instruction has on any student. While some would argue that students who are home-schooled don't get the socialization that school children do, many parents network with other home-schooling parents for field trips, projects and other group activities. Finally, the rules for home-schooling are fairly loose in most states. Parents need not be certified teachers, students are not required to pass any particular tests and there is no one to oversee the quality of the instructional environment.

Parent Partnerships - The School Perspective

Another way to look at parent partnerships is from the school's perspective. If they want and need more parent participation, what are the ways they can achieve this? Joyce Epstein, out of Johns Hopkins University, has produced much acclaimed research regarding parent involvement in education over the past 10 years. From her research she has identified 6 areas of parent involvement that schools and parents can focus on when developing parent supportive programs at their sites. The following list includes some examples of the best practices for schools within these areas:

Parenting

Parents and schools can work together to help parents establish home environments which support children as students by:

- Establishing policies that support and respect family responsibilities, recognizing the variety of parenting traditions and practices within the community's cultural and religious diversity.
- Developing family resource centers at schools.
- Encouraging staff members to demonstrate respect for fami lies and the family's primary role in the rearing of children to become responsible adults.

Communicating

Parents and schools can work together to design effective forms of school-to-parent and parent-to-school communications about school programs and children's progress by:

- Establishing opportunities for parents and educators to share partnering information such as student strengths and learning preferences.
- Allowing parent-teacher conferences to be held at times and places convenient to working parents.
- Facilitating access to voice mail, e-mail or telephones to make it easier for teachers and parents to communicate with each other during the work/school day.
- Providing language translators to assist families as needed.

Volunteering

Parents and schools can work together to recruit and organize parent support by:

- Having a parent volunteer coordinator who will encourage, coordinate and nurture parent and community volunteer efforts.
- Ensuring that office staff greetings, signage near the entrances and any other interactions with parents create a climate in which parents feels valued and welcome,
- Surveying parents regarding their interests, talents and availability, then coordinating the parent resources with those that exist within the school and among the faculty.
- Ensuring that parents who are unable to volunteer in the school building are given options for helping in other ways, at home or place of employment.

Learning At Home

Parents and schools can work together to support parents in helping their children with homework by:

- Developing information packets on homework policies and the skills required of the students in all subjects at each grade level.
- Establishing information hot-lines or voice mail for homework and classroom assignments.
- Hosting school-based education seminars which reach out to dads, grandparents and others.
- Provide information regarding how parents can foster learning at home, give appropriate assistance, monitor homework and give feedback to teachers.

Decision-Making

Parents and schools can work together to include parents in school decisions and develop parent leaders and representatives by:

- Designing mentor programs where schools, businesses and working parents can share skills and knowledge with each other.
- Providing understandable, accessible, and well-publicized processes for influencing decisions, raising issues or concerns, appealing decisions and resolving problems.
- Encouraging the formation of parent groups beyond the PTA/PTO to identify and respond to issues of interest to parents.

Collaborating With Community

Parents and schools can work together to utilize the services and resources from the community to support parent involvement by:

- Providing school-based information on community health, recreational, cultural and other community resources/supports.
- Establishing partnerships with local businesses and service groups to advance student learning and assist schools and families.
- Fostering student participation in community service.
- Informing staff members of the resources in the community and strategies for utilizing those resources.

For the National PTA Guide to Parent Involvement that includes a comprehensive list of strategies form Joyce Epstein's work, call: 800-307-4782

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Billions of dollars are spent every year by businesses training and retraining their employees. Many people come to the companies with little more than a 6th grade reading level and minimal writing and math skills. At the same time, employers are requiring a more educated work-force. Businesses are beginning to understand their role in strengthening the education system from which their current and future employees will emerge.

Maintaining business partners for any school and/or business takes a tremendous amount of time and effort. Parent volunteers who assist and lead these partnerships can make an exponentially great contribution to the students at their school. The most important thing to remember is that whatever you decide to embark on with a business, you must always have the students' best interests in mind. Never forget to put their well-being first.

There are three categories of resources that businesses can contribute to schools. They can provide direct funding in which businesses donate money for programs, capital equipment such as computers and/or give it to an internal organization such as PTO/PTA to use at their discretion. In-kind contributions include sharing of facilities, equipment, services and/or product donations. Some businesses enable and/or encourage employees to be volunteers. These people may be classroom volunteers, mentors for individual students or work on site councils and committees.

Which of these any company is willing to put forth depends upon the nature of their business. For example, newspapers and television stations may want to contribute direct funding rather than take reporters offline to volunteer. Smaller businesses may want to send in volunteers rather than tie up precious capital. In any case there are recommended processes for establishing and maintaining good partnerships that have proven highly effective.

Building Formal Business Partnerships

Awareness: Hold meetings with staff, parents and community members to discuss the idea of developing business partnerships. Ask yourselves what is working and not working at the school. What are the biggest obstacles and what is needed to solve these issues? How would business partnership help meet these needs?

Needs Assessment: Determine what needs and resources exist at the school site and perhaps with regards to the businesses themselves. How do the school and local business(es) needs and resources overlap? Define common interests and priorities.

Goals and Objectives: Establish the goals and objectives of the partnership based on the information accumulated thus far. The goal should be broad in scope while the objectives should be measurable, specific and the focus of the evaluation. Focus on a specific priority educational need that is matched with business need such as schools need better training for teachers on math and science instruction while businesses need more students coming to work with better basic skills and work ethics.

Program Design: Once you have established what you would like to accomplish, decide who will be in charge, what the tasks are to accomplish the goals and objectives, when the outcomes should be complete and how the system will evaluate its success.

Program Implementation: It is recommended that a committee, chaired by the person in charge, monitor, evaluate, review and redesign the program as needed. Managing the partnership can be difficult at first but once the relationships are built and the first steps are taken, the rest will get easier. Establish an open communication system with those involved to get ongoing feedback on how it's going.

Program Evaluation: It is important also to evaluate and celebrate on a regular basis; every 6 months to a year. Your business partners need to feel appreciated and to see the results of their efforts. Provide ongoing feedback to your partners to ensure their continued support.

Building Informal Business Partnerships

If you are going out to local businesses to establish informal partnerships, you will want to put your needs in writing. On a one page overview of your need(s), lay out the objective you are looking to accomplish (outcome), the supporting rationale (how this relates to district, school, and/or classroom goals), the evaluation component (what will the end result be), and what exactly your need from the business (money, volunteers). See example in the APPENDIX. When you get the support you need always remember to thank them and some how share the outcome with them so they see the money or time was well spent.
For more information about how to develop business partnerships as well as find best practices, call Partners In Education 1-703-836-4880 or check out their website at: www.NAPEhq.org

Community Partnerships

As teachers and parents, we tend to see ourselves and our children only as they stand in our classroom or our home. It is difficult to admit and/or ask for assistance when a student needs more than we alone can give them. But it is important for all of us to recognize that we are part of a vast community that is filled with national, state and local resources if we are open to them.

National programs and resources vary greatly but are accessible to all. Organizations and agencies that provide everything from advice to grant money can be found by searching the internet or calling the U.S. Department of Education if it is related to education. America's Promise- The Alliance for Youth, spearheaded by General Colin Powell in 1996, has categorized the resources for youth into five areas; **mentor**- a caring adult in each child's life, **teach**- making sure each child has a marketable skill through education, **protect**- ensuring all children are in safe environments, **nurture**- providing each child with proper healthcare, and **serve**- giving each child an opportunity to give back to their community.

America's Promise -The Alliance for Youth: www.americaspromise.com 1-888-55-YOUTH

National Resources for Youth

Mentoring Agencies

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
1-212-567-7000

100 Black Men of America
1-404-892-5534

The National Mentoring Partnership
1-202-729-4340

The Salvation Army
1-703-684-5500

Save The Children
1-800-243-5075

Creative Mentoring
1-302-633-6226

Safe Places Agencies

Boys and Girds Clubs of America
1-404-815-5700

Habitat for Humanity
1-800-HABITAT

Volunteers of America
1-703-548-2288

YMCA of the USA
1-312-977-0031

YWCA of the USA
1-212-273-7800

Healthy Start Agencies

Coalition for Healthier Cities & Communities
1-312-422-2635

HOPE for kids
1-610-254-8800

March of Dimes
1-800-771-3272

Marketable Skills Agencies

America Reads
1-800-USA-LEARN

Junior Achievement
1-719-540-8000

National Council for La Raza
1-202-785-1670

National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship
1-212-232-3333

United Way of America
1-703-836-7100

Community Service Agencies

Campus Compact
1-401-863-1119

Campus Outreach Opportunity League
1-202-637-7004

The Catholic Network of Volunteer Service
1-800-543-5046

City Year
1-617-927-2500

Communities In Schools
1-703-519-8999

Corporation for National Service
1-202-606-5000

Do Something
1-212-523-1175

Girl Scouts of the USA
1-800-GSUSA-4U

Greek Orthodox Church of America
1-212-570-3500

National Council of Volunteer Centers
1-800-VOLUNTEER

National 4-H
1-800-77-YOUTH

The Points of Light Foundation
1-202-729-8000

Public Allies
1-202-293-3969

Youth Service America
1-202-296-2992

State and local resources can be found by calling your State Department of Education or your local school board/district office. There are endless numbers of programs and agencies that offer assistance for families and youth but they can take time to find. Be sure to ask many questions of them before engaging them in your school. Take the time to call references to make sure they actually do what they say they will. Again always make sure that whatever you do, you are keeping the child's best interests at heart. Also be sure to be sensitive to the family's situation. Offer but don't insist.

Legislative Action

You may want to influence education in your community through legislative action. Parents can be a very powerful voice for change in any community especially when they have a comprehensive well-defined message and mission.

Goals of a Legislative Action Community

☐ To provide members with information on current legislative issues for effective participation in local and state government.

☐ To provide information and training so that members can:

- understand their responsibilities as citizens in the democratic process.
- become knowledgeable about how the government functions.
- learn how and where the individual can intervene to promote the interest of children.

☐ To present to legislators at all levels, and to other government officials, positions on proposed laws that affect the education, health and well-being of children.

Following are duties a legislative chairperson for a school or district might have:

☐ Read and share with parents the legislative updates provided by the school district or otherwise gathered such as articles about pending legislation and copies or summaries of bills that are being introduced.

☐ Start a telephone tree to solicit parents who are willing to phone or write their legislators when contacted and requested to do so.

☐ Recruit others in the community to be included in the dissemination of information.

☐ Participate by attending committee meetings at the Legislature as needed.

Effective Networking/Advocacy

☐ Getting Ready
- Define your group's goals and interests.
- What do you want to accomplish?
- Be specific as to needs and have suggested solutions.
- Does the needed improvement require a change to an existing law, better enforcement of an existing law or the creation of a completely new law?

☐ Defining Support and Opposition
- Who are you allies? Who may oppose you?
- Who respects you? Who represents you?
- How does the media represent the issue?
- Who else shares the same beliefs?
- Anticipate challengers!

☐ Organization
- Develop EXPERTISE in your interest area.
- Have factual information supporting your position well organized and available. Have documentation.
- Be knowledgeable, be specific.
- Find all resources available to you.
- Use the media to help educate the public.
- Advance your cause by coalition building.
- Be flexible. Negotiation is a big part of successful advocating.

☐ Know Your Legislators-Guidelines for working with legislators:

- Try to get to know your districts legislators on a personal basis.
- Don't underestimate legislators. With very rare exceptions, they will be honest, intelligent and will want to do the right thing. Your job is to let them know how proposed legislation impacts your children and your school.
- Don't feel politics is unworthy of your attention. It's going to happen with or without your contribution. It is better to be part of the process.
- Be understanding. Put yourself in your legislators' place. Try to understand their problems, their outlooks, their aims and by doing so you will be more likely to persuade them to do the same in understanding yours.
- Be friendly. Don't contact legislators only when you want their help. Organizing multi-school parent and staff meetings before the legislative session gives your representatives a chance to share their goals and to hear from you.
- Be thoughtful. Commend the positive things legislators do.

Guidelines reprinted from "Effective Political Communications," published by the American Association of School Administrators.

Additional Resources

- Parents Are Lifesavers by Carol S. Batey, Corwin Press, 1996.
- Parent Involvement and the Political Principal by Seymour B. Sarason, Jossey-Bass Inc., 1995.
- How to Give Your Child An Excellent Public School Education by Susan Mansell, Citadel Press, 1998.
- Beyond the Classroom by Laurence Steinberg, Simon & Schuster, 1996.

Appendix

BOOK CELEBRATION ACTIVITIES

- Draw a comic strip of the most important event in the story.
- Make a soap, wood or clay model of a character.
- Write a different ending to the story.
- Make a list of questions you feel everyone should be able to answer after reading the book.
- Make a diorama showing the most exciting part of the book or the part you liked best.
- Make a time line of events in the story.
- Make a crossword puzzle or word search using words from the book.
- Make a puppet to represent a character in the book.
- Make four pictures to show what happened in the story. Arrange the pictures in order and write a sentence under each picture to tell what is happening.
- Make a mobile about the book drawing character and scenes from the book.
- Make a mask of one of the characters.
- Write a paragraph telling something that you have seen or done yourself which is similar to what you read in the book.
- Make a poster to promote or advertise the book.
- Write a riddle book about the story.
- Write a letter to one of the characters in the story.
- Write a letter to the author or illustrator of the book telling them what you liked and didn't like about the book. Send it c/o the publishing company.

Internet Resource Guide to the Best Children's Software - June 1998

The Edutainment Catalog™
800-338-3844
e-mail: edutained@aol.com

Newsweek's Parent Guide To Children's Software '97
http://www.newsweekparentsguide.com

The Review Zone
http://www.TheReviewZone.com/

The School House Software Review
http://www.worldvillage.com/wv/school/html/scholrev.htm

Superkids: Educational Software Review
http://www.superkids.con/aweb/pages/contents.html

Best Of Children's Software by Age Group & Subject

Preschool - Language

- **Arthur's Reading Race by Living Books** - $29.95
  Ages 3-7, Windows or Mac (2/97) **800-776-4724**

- **Disney's Animated Story Book -** $39.95
  101 Dalmations by Disney Interactive
  Ages 3-7, Windows or Mac (12/96) **800-900-9234**

- **More Bugs In A Box -** SMRP: $19.95
  Simon & Schuster Interactive
  Ages 3-6, Windows or Mac (9/96) **800-545-7677**

- **Reader Rabbit 1-** SMRP: $42.00
  The Leaning company
  Ages 3-6, Windows or Mac (2/97) **800-227-5609**

- **Pajama Sam: No Need To Hide When It's Dark Outside**
  Humongous Entertainment - $39.95
  Ages 3-8, CD-ROM, Windows & Mac (12/96) **800-499-8386**

Preschool - Math, Logic and Science

- **Putt Putt Travels Through Time**
  Humongous Entertainment - $39.95
  Ages 3-8, CD-ROM, Windows and Mac (6/97) **800-499-8386**

- **Sammy's Science House** - Edmark - $49.95
  Five activities introduce early science thinking (9/94)
  Ages 3-7, Mac-DOS-Windows-Disk or CD-Rom **800-426-0856**

Preschool - Art and Creativity

- **Kid Pix Studio** - Broderbund Software - $44.95
  Ages 3 and up, Mac-Windows-CD-ROM (10/93 **800-521-6263**

- **PlaySkool Puzzles** - $39.95
  Playskool Children's Educational Software (4/96)
  Ages 3-6, Windows '95-Windows 3.1-CD-ROM **800-638-6927**

Preschool - All Purpose

- **Eager To Learn!** Sierra Online - SMRP:$30.00
  Ages 4-7, Windows-Mac (12/96) **800-757-7707**

- **Franklin's Activity Center** - Sanctuary Woods
  Ages 4-9, Window, Mac (6/97) **800-943-3664**

- **JumpStart Preschool Deluxe** - Knowledge Adventure - $54.95
  Ages 2-5, Windows-Mac- CD-ROM (4/96) **800-542-4240**

- **Microsoft Plus For Kids** - Microsoft Corp - SMRP $24.95
  Ages 3-12, Windows'95 (5 /97) **800-426-9400**

- **The Playroom CD-ROM** - Broderbund - $49.95
  Age 3-6, CD-Rom -Windows-Mac (10/93) **800-521-6263**

- **Tonka Construction** - Hasbro Interactive - SMRP $29.99
  Age 4-8, Window-Mac (11/96) **800-638-6927**

Early Elementary Grades K-2 - Reading

- **Stellalun** - Living Books - SMR: $29.95
  Ages 3-7, Windows-Mac-CD-ROM (12/96)

- **Grammar Rock** - Creative Wonders (2/96)
  Ages 6-10 Windows '95-3.1-MacOS-CD-ROM **800-543-9778**

- **Kid Phonics 2** - Davidson & Associates - $35.00
  Windows- Mac (0/96) **800-545-7677**

- **Reading Blaster 2000** - Davidson & Associates - $35.00
  Windows-Mac (2/97) **800-545-7677**

Writing

- **Kid Works Deluxe** - Davidson - $35.00
  Ages 4-9, Window-MacOS-CD-ROM (2/96) **800--545-7677**

- **Stanley's Sticker Stories** - Edmark Corporation - $39.00
  Windows-Mac (9/96) **800-362-2890**

Math and Logic

- **Mighty Math Carnival Countdown** - Edmark Corporation - $39.95
  Ages 5-7, Windows-Mac (9/96) **800-362-2890**

- **My Make Believe Castle** - Logo Computer Systems - SMRP: $35.00
  Ages 4-7, Windows-Mac (10/96) **800-321-5646**

- **Sticky Bear's Math Splash** - Optimum Resource Inc. - $59.95
  Ages 5-10, Windows-Mac (10/96) **888-784-2592**

- **Thinkin' Things & Thinkin' Things Collection 2** - Edmark Corp - $49.95
  Ages 4-8, DOS-Windows-Mac (12/93) **800-426-0856**

- **Treasure Math Storm** - The Leaning Company - SRMP:$38.00
  Ages 5-9, Windows-Mac (2/97) **800-227-5609**

Science and Social Studies

- **Magic School Bus Explores Inside the Earth** - Microsoft - $49.95
  Ages 6-10, CD-ROM Mac-Windows (9/96) **800-376-5125**

- **Magic School Bus Explores the Age of Dinosaurs** - Microsoft - $34.95
  Ages 6-10, Window-Mac (10/96) **800-376-5125**

- **SimTown - Maxis** - $44.95
  Ages 8-12, Windows '95-3.1-MacOS CD-ROM (4/95) **800-336-2947**

Creativity

- **Adobe Art Explorer** - Adobe systems Inc. $30.00
  Ages 6 and up, MacOS-CD-ROM (2/96) **800-888-6293**

- **Making Music** - Forest Technologies SMRP: $39.95
  Ages 5 and up- Windows-Mac (10/96) **800-544-3356**

• **Music Ace** - Harmoni Vision SMRP: 39.95
Ages 8 and up - Window-Mac (2/97) **800-644-4994**

• **Orli's Draw-A-Story** - Broderbund Software SMRP"$39.95
Ages 8 and up - Window-Mac (2/97) **800-521-6263**

All-Purpose

• **JumpStart Series** - Knowledge Adventure SMRP:$33.00
Ages Pre-K to Grade 2 , Windows-Mac 9/95, 4/96) **800-542-4240**

• **Treehouse** - Broderbund Software - $40.00
Ages 3-6, Windows-Mac (10/96) **800-521-6263**

Upper Elementary - Grades 3-6 - Reading

• **Microsoft Creative Writer 2** - Microsoft Corporation $34.95
Ages 8 and up, Windows (6/95) **800-426-9400**
(Note: 16mb of RAM recommended.)

• **Reading Galaxy** (formerly called Alien Tales) - Broderbund $39.95
Ages 9-14, Windows'95, Win3.1, MacOS CD-ROM (6/95) **800-521-6263**

Math and Logic

• **Chess Mates** - Brainstorm SMRP: $34.95
Ages 8 and up, Window-Mac (12/96) **800-428-8200**

• **Math Heads** - Theatrix Interactive SMRP: $29.95
Ages 9-13, Windows-Mac (12/96) **800-521-6263**

• **Mega Math Blaster** - Davidson & Associates $44.95
Windows-Mac (10/96) **800-545-7677**

• **Mighty Math Calculating Crew** - Edmark Corporation $39.95
Window-Mac (12/96) **800-362-2890**

• **The Lost Mind of Dr. Brain** - Sierra Online $49.95
Ages 11 and up, CD-ROM for Mac-Windows (6/95) **800-757-7707**

• **The Time Warp of Dr. Brain** - Sierra Online $49.95
Ages 11 and up , CD-ROM for Mac-Windows (2/97) **800-757-7707**

History

- **Critical Mass** - Corbis Publishing $35.00
  Ages 10 and up, Mac-Windows (9/96) **800-260-0444**

- **Go West! The Homesteader's Challenge** - Brighter Child Interactive $49.95
  Ages 9-14, Window-Mac (12/96) **(614)847-8118**

Geography

- **Street Atlas USA 4.0 -** Delorme Mapping SMRP: $45.00
  Ages 9 and up, Windows CD-ROM **800-521-6263**

- **Where In The World Is Carmen Sandiego** - Broderbund $40.00
  Ages 8 and up, CD-ROM Mac-Windows (10/96) **800-521-6263**

Science and Geography

- **Sim Park** - Maxis Software for Kids SMRP: $39.95
  AGes 8 and up, Window-CD-ROM (12/96)

- **GeoSafari Animals** - Educational Insights Interactive $29.95
  Ages 8 and up, Window'9-Win3.1-MacOS-CD-ROM (12/96)

Creativity

- **Print Artist CD Edition** - Sierra Online $59.95
  Ages 10 and up, Windows-CD-ROM (10.96) **800-757-7707**

- **Sim Tunes -** Maxis Software $34.95
  Ages 6 and up - Window (10/96)

Reference

- **Microsoft Bookshelf 1996-97 Edition** - Microsoft Corp. $54.95
  Ages 10 and up, Window-Mac (10./96) **800-426-9400**

- **Microsoft Encarta '97 World Atlas -** Microsoft Corp. $54.95
  Ages 10 and up, Window'95 (5/97) **800-426-9400**

- **Random House Kid's Encyclopedia** - Knowledge Adventure $29.95
  Windows (10/96) **800-622-1244**

This list of software is from:
Children's Software Revue
44 Main Street
Flemington, NJ 08822

Office: (908) 284-0404
Fax: (908) 284-0405
Website:
www.microweb.com/pepsite/Revue/allstar

Will Piano Lessons Make My Child Smarter?

Everyone has some natural musical ability. How much may be limited by our genes, but it is our environment and experience that determine whether we reach that potential. It's never too late to start lessons. While experts recommend early exposure to music, new studies show that the brain is in a life-long process of growth and renewal. Indeed; now might be a great opportunity to take lessons yourself!

Infants

- Speak rhythmically. Just talking to a baby in a high-pitched, rhythmic, singsong speech style ("baby talk") is making music with your child.
- Sing songs to your baby throughout the day and end with an evening lullaby. Interact with him/her when you sing. Move his/her arms and legs to the rhythm.
- Listen to music. Put on Mozart or the like.
- Don't overdo it. Be aware of how much stimulation children can comfortably receive.

Toddlers

- Introduce your child to musical activities. These can be fun games such as playing different rhythms and clapping your hands together with him. Give him a sense of high and low, loud and soft.
- Start to acquaint children with different instruments - recorders and drums, for example - and patiently listen to their exercises.
- Ask children to express their feeling about what they hear by creating a drawing.

Preschoolers

- Music lessons. Between the ages of 2 1/2 and 4, depending on your child's affinity and aptitude, you can start music lessons. Piano and violin are the most popular. There are several ways to teach music to preschoolers: traditional lessons, Suzuki or Yamaha methods as well as the systems of the composers Zoltan Kodaly and Carl Orff.
- Inexpensive substitutes. If you can't afford lessons, get a little keyboard for around $30.
- Let them have fun. "Don't put the child in a situation where he's being forced to learn something he's not enjoying," says Dr. John Grassi, a learning specialist. There must be a balance between the discipline required to play an instrument and the enjoyment he gets from the process of music-making.

School Age

- Get involved in your children's activities at school. If there is no music in the curriculum, take action. Administrators listen to parents.

Encourage Your Children - Parade Magazine, June 14, 1998

Sample Weekly Schedule

(Reproducible copy in the Templates Section)

	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
8:00					
8:30					
9:00	Colleen to Preschool		Colleen to Preschool		Colleen to Preschool
9:00					
2:30	School	School	School	School	School
2:30					
3:00					
3:30	Molly-piano	Bill - BB practice	Molly dance	Colleen dance	
4:00					
4:30	Colleen-piano			Bill - BB practice	
5:00					
5:30					
6:00					
6:30	Bill-Karate				
7:00					
7:30					
8:00					

My Child's Perceptual Learning Styles - Checklist

Directions: Place a check mark in the ☐ that applies to your child. Add up the number of checks at the bottom of the page to determine if he/she has an area that stands out.

Kinesthetic Strengths

☐ Has difficulty sitting when he/she has to listen.

☐ Prefers action oriented activities.

☐ Prefers to learn by doing.

☐ Has difficulty following oral instructions.

☐ Likes competition.

☐ Demonstrates emotion physically; pats, hits, hugs, high-fives.

☐ Has difficulty expressing him/herself using words.

TOTAL

Visual Strengths

☐ Can put something together without help using printed directions.

☐ Very observant of details.

☐ Good at solving puzzles.

☐ Likes to write and receive notes.

☐ Likes to see printed or drawn material when learning something new.

☐ Remembers better if able to picture it in his/her mind's eye.

☐ Would rather read information than have it read to him/her.

TOTAL

Auditory Strengths

☐ Can easily repeat lyrics after hearing a song once or twice.

☐ Talks to him/herself when working a problem.

☐ Easily follows oral directions.

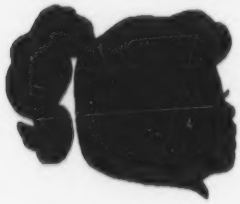
☐ Likes to read aloud or murmur when reading.

☐ Doesn't like to read diagrams, maps or charts.

☐ Likes to talk a lot and is a good communicator.

☐ Remembers information better when heard than when seen.

TOTAL



Your Child's Learning Profile
- Academics -

Reading

My child's academic performance
level in this area is ☐ AT ☐ ABOVE ☐ BELOW grade level

I am proud of my child's ability(ies) to:

I am concerned about my
child's inability(ies) to:

Evidence:

Math

My child's academic performance
level in this area is ☐ AT ☐ ABOVE ☐ BELOW grade level

I am proud of my child's ability(ies) to:

I am concerned about my
child's inability(ies) to:

Evidence:

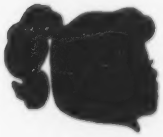
Writing

My child's academic performance
level in this area is ☐ AT ☐ ABOVE ☐ BELOW grade level

I am proud of my child's ability(ies) to:

I am concerned about my
child's inability(ies) to:

Evidence:



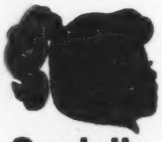
My Child Shows An Interest In The Following Areas:

Social Studies (i.e. MAPS, DATES, PEOPLE and TIMES of historical events)
Evidence:

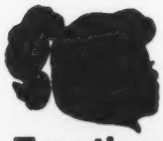
Science (i.e. The PHYSICAL WORLD, ANIMALS, WEATHER)
Evidence:

The Arts (i.e. VISUAL ART, MUSIC PERFORMANCE, MUSIC ENJOYMENT, PERFORMING ARTS)
Evidence:

Physical Movement (i.e. SPORTS, DANCE)
Evidence:



Socially my child:



Emotionally my child:

ABOUT MY CHILD'S LEARNING STYLE PREFERENCES:

ABOUT MY CHILD'S MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE INTEREST AREAS:

List Of Strategies I Want To Try

1.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
2.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
3.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
4.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
5.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
6.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
7.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
8.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
9.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
10.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
11.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
12.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
13.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
14.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
15.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
16.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
17.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
18.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
19.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud
20.	☐ Worked ☐ Dud

Letter Of Introduction (Worksheet)

Date

Dear Mr. (Mrs. or Ms) Kotter,
Introductory Paragraph: Describe your family, family values and/or environment, and the purpose of the letter.

Academic, Social, Emotional Needs Paragraph:
See **Understanding Your Child As A Learner**
by P.E.P. Consulting.

Final paragraph stating your expectations: How you plan to support the classroom and level of involvement you are looking for.

Sincerely,

Example Of Environmental Request Form

Dear Parent/Guardians:

As we begin the fourth quarter of the 1997-98 school year we must already look forward to next year. We take seriously our responsibility for meeting the social, emotional and academic needs of all 900 students here at YOUR SCHOOL'S NAME HERE and your role as a parent and partner in the process. The placement of students into a classroom environment where the teaching style meets their learning needs is a time consuming and sometimes difficult process. The criteria that must be considered for the benefit of all students are:

- Achievement Mixture
- Ability Mixture
- Group Dynamics
- Comparable Class Size
- Distribution of Boys and Girls
- Ethnic Balance
- Language Proficiency

The process is as follows:

"DATE" Environmental Request Forms are sent out with 3rd quarter report cards.

"DATE" Last day to submit Environmental Request Forms
Current year teachers, gifted specialist, and special education teachers meet to place students for next year. Environmental Request Forms and Student Placement Cards are reviewed for each child.

"DATE" Principal reviews and finalizes placements.

"DATE" Post cards informing parents of their child's placement are sent out.

The two most important documents in the process are the Student Placement Cards, which outlines the **teacher's perspective** of the child's social, emotional and academic needs and the Environmental Request Form which outlines the **parents' perspective** of their child's social, emotional and academic needs. The teachers (or administrators) will use this information and their best professional judgement to place your child in the optimum classroom environment. Your perspective as given on the back of this sheet is valuable so please take the time to fill it out and **return it to the school no later than "DATE".**

Thank you for assisting us in meeting your child's learning needs now and throughout the school year.

The School Staff

Student Name_____ Current Grade_____

ENVIRONMENTAL REQUEST FORM FOR CLASS PLACEMENT (YOUR SCHOOL'S NAME HERE)

Please check the phrases that best describe your child's learning style. Include a short commentary if needed. If you are unsure just leave it blank.

My child prefers:

__working in groups __working alone __working in pairs

__one-on-one instruction __group instruction __discovery of information

__verbal instructions __written instructions __demonstrations

__activity oriented learning __paper and pencil work using standardized materials

__a structured learning environment with order and some predictability

__an informal learning environment where movement and some noise are acceptable

__knowing there's a set schedule for the day __having flexibility and flow

__movement and use of body during learning __product-driven outcomes

__demonstrating what is learned __written expression of learned material

__verbal expression of learned material

My child prefers a teacher who:

__is highly structured with regards to discipline __promotes self discipline

__teaches in a quiet and calm atmosphere __allows students to interact regularly

As a parent I prefer a teacher who will:

__bring out my child's love of _____

__communicate with me ☐ weekly ☐ monthly ☐ quarterly

__invite me to volunteer in the classroom

☐ once a week ☐ once a month ☐ at my convenience

The most important thing to consider about my child when making a placement is:

Form For Effective Decision -Making Conferences

The Purpose or Outcome of this meeting is:

My concern/issue is:

My point of view is:

The other point(s) of view is (are):

Possible solutions are:

The one chosen is:

The person to get back to us is_____

The person will get back to us on this date_____

District Data Sheet

Highlight the information you wish to know about your district

District:

_____ Size
_____ Enrollment figures
_____ Boundaries
_____ # of Schools
_____ Grade Levels

School Board:

_____ Size
_____ Term
_____ Meeting Forum
_____ Philosophy

Superintendent:

_____ Organizational
_____ Structure
_____ Departments
_____ Mission Statement

Statistics:

_____ Attendance Rate
_____ Teacher Turnover
_____ Student/Teacher Ratios
_____ Test Scores
_____ Admin/Teacher Ratios
_____ Rate of Growth
_____ Ethnic Diversity

Operations:

_____ Transportation
_____ Boundary Exceptions
_____ Building
_____ Funding
_____ Budgets
_____ Calendar
_____ Accommodations for Growth
_____ Technology

Programs/Policies:

_____ Curriculum
_____ Homework
_____ Before/After school Childcare
_____ Preschool
_____ Special Education
_____ Summer Programs
_____ Gifted Education
_____ Parent/Community Education
_____ Holiday Celebrations
_____ Promotion/Retention
_____ Sports
_____ Music
_____ Art
_____ Parent Conferences
_____ Report Cards
_____ Awards
_____ Communication

Staff:

_____ # of Teachers
_____ Teacher Compensation
_____ Building
_____ Staff Development
_____ Teacher Profile

Other areas not listed:

_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____
_____ _____

School Data Sheet

Highlight the information you wish to know about your school

Management:

_____ Principal
_____ Assistant Principals (Certified Specialist)
_____ Management Team
_____ Mission Statements
_____ Boundaries

Academics

_____ Curriculum Objectives
_____ Innovative Programs
_____ Technology
_____ Kindergarten
_____ Gifted Education
_____ Special Education

Statistics:

_____ # of Teachers
_____ # of Students
_____ Student/Teacher Ratio
_____ Absenteeism/Teachers
_____ Absenteeism/Students
_____ Teacher Turnover
_____ Ethnic Diversity
_____ # of Students on Free or Reduced Lunch
_____ Stanford 9 Test Scores

Resources:

_____ Before/After School Programs
_____ Community Programs and Resources
_____ DARE
_____ Counseling
_____ Health Care
_____ Preschool Program

Policies:

_____ Student Evaluation and Conferences
_____ Field Trips
_____ Guest Speakers
_____ Dress Code

Community:

_____ PTO/PTA
_____ Student Organ/Clubs

Specific To Middle/High School:

_____ Community and School Socials
_____ Advisors
_____ Sports/Intramural
_____ Scheduling
_____ Homeroom Assignment
_____ Language/Math Placement
_____ Organ/TimeManagement

Specific To High School:

_____ Honors Credits
_____ College Credits
_____ Vocational Education

Facilities:

_____ Classrooms
_____ Computer Lab/Tech
_____ Health Office
_____ Office
_____ Lunch Room/Gym
_____ Music Room/Stage
_____ Art Room
_____ Playground/Ramadas
_____ Library
_____ Science Lab

Sample Request for Resources
VISION FIELD TRIPS

Objective

The objective of the Vision Field Trips is to help acquaint and familiarize students with the various institutions of higher learning in the metropolitan Phoenix area in an effort for students to better understand the role that education plays in preparation for their future. Prior to visiting the campus, students will engage in learning activities which will culminate in a field trip to an institution of higher learning. Teachers will have preteaching components in area such as mathematics, science, visual arts, drama and television production. By having the field trip experience, students will be able to see how knowledge is put into action and that further study in the field is available at our institutions of higher learning.

After students have taken the field trip, there are follow up activities in their classrooms which relate to the field trip. There is an application process for teachers to participate in this endeavor. The application includes questions regarding the purpose of the field trip, preteaching activities, expectations, follow-up activities and evaluation.

Supporting Rationale

The decision to attend post-secondary education is made very early in a child's life. By exposing the young students to the opportunity that higher education offers, it is expected that many students will set their sights on going on to an institution of higher learning after finishing secondary schooling.

Evaluation Component

Each field trip will be evaluated on criteria established in the application process. The evaluation will differ for each visitation, as the purposes for the visitations will be different. Each teacher making application for this visitation will have to establish the criteria for evaluation and a committee of teachers and administrators will approve or deny the request.

Funding Needed

A donation of $150 to $200 will fund a field trip for two busloads of students.

Glossary Of Terms

Educational Vocabulary

• **Ability Grouping** - Diagnosing, grouping and instructing children based on their academic level of achievement.

• **Academic Rationalist** - Teacher-centered instruction transmitting major concepts, values and truths of society. Classics, great books and traditional values. Memorization, demonstration and drill. Evaluation through summative examinations, achievement testing and content mastery.

• **Active Learning** - See **Constructivism**

• **Alternative Schools** - For children with learning or discipline problems.

• **At-risk students** - Students who are not keeping up with their peers in one or more academic, social or emotional areas.

• **Authentic assessment** - See **Performance-based assessment**

• **Back-to-basics** - Basic academics, usually with an emphasis on phonics-based reading instruction and drill and practice of skills.

• **Bilingual program** - Teaches children, whose command of the English language is limited, in their native language.

• **Centers** - Areas set up for students to work on activities related to a specific area of the curriculum.

• **Cognitive Processor** - The use of intellectual reasoning to solve problems and to make rational decisions. Emphasis on teaching "how to learn" rather than teaching knowledge or information. Evaluation based on performance in problem-solving situations.

• **Constructivism** - "Learn by doing". "Staging" something rather than reading about it from a text. Knowledge we acquire on our own is easier to remember than the knowledge we get from others. Also known as **active learning** or **discovery learning**.

• **Cooperative learning** - Students divided into small teams to study, solve problems and complete projects - cooperating with others the way they supposedly must in "real life," Students present their findings to fellow groups.

• **Criterion Referenced Test** - Measuring how thoroughly a child understands a subject area irrespective of how well others have learned it.

• **Developmentally Appropriate Classroom** - Understanding the intellectual, social, emotional, physical and language developmental changes in children and offering learning experiences that challenge those children.

• **Differentiation** - Challenging students in one area of the curriculum simultaneously by setting up different expectations.

• **Discovery Learning** - See **Constructivism**

• **Discussions** - Students interact verbally about learning material.

• **ESL program** - Students whose native language is not English and do not have sufficient command of the English language are put into **E**nglish **S**econd **L**anguage programs. Students learn to speak and write English outside of the regular classroom (as a **Pull-Out**), while still allowing them to participate in core curriculum activities in the classroom.

• **Global education** - **Multicultural education**. Helping students relate to diverse - usually non-European - cultures. Children are encouraged to "celebrate differences" while learning about the bonds they share with others.

• **Hands-On Activities** - Activities related to specific areas of the curriculum.

• **Heterogeneous grouping** - Grouping your students in a way that includes the most variety of aptitudes, abilities, genders, cultures, etc.

• **Home Schooling** - Teaching children outside the public school system. Parents or guardians do not have to have a degree.

• **Homogeneous grouping** - Grouping students with similar qualities such as abilities, genders and cultures.

• **Inclusion** - **Mainstreaming** - Students with disabilities taught in the same schools as their peers, together or in separate classes.

• **Independent Work** - Work sheets or quiet study time.

• **In-service** - Staff training run at the school or district office. Days when students will not be in school, but teachers will.

• **Intrinsic Motivation** - Students control their own behavior program and monitor themselves with teacher guidance.

• **Job-Sharing** - Two or more teachers sharing a full-time contract.

• **Lecture Method** - Teachers giving information to the students.

• **Magnet Schools** - Schools that offer intensive course work in specific areas or thematic instruction.

• **Mainstreaming** - See **Inclusion**

• **Montessori Schools** - Schools emphasizing hands-on learning, flexible grouping and individualized development. Named for Maria Montessori.

• **Multi-age Instruction** - Students of different grade levels in one classroom.

• **Multi-age Schools** - Children of two and three different grade levels in the same classroom staying with the same teacher for two to three years.

• **Multicultural education** - See **Global education**

• **Norm-referenced tests** - Tests scored relative to the performance of other students as opposed to **criterion-referenced tests** - tests measuring how thoroughly each child understands a subject irrespective of how well others have learned it.

• **Outcomes-based education** - **Standards-based education** - Spelling out what students should know and be able to do by the time they graduate and devising a curriculum to help them.

• **Parochial Schools** - Tuition-based schools run by religious organizations.

• **Performance-based assessment**- Testing what a child learns through practical, hands-on tasks. Also known as **Authentic assessment** or **Portfolio-based assessment.**

• **Portfolio-based assessment** - See **Performance-based assessment.**

• **Public Charter Schools** - Publicly funded schools formed by parents, teachers or other private groups or individuals who have almost complete autonomy over hiring teachers and developing academic programs.

• **Public Neighborhood School** -Schools that draw enrollment from the surrounding residential areas.

• **Private Schools** - Tuition-based schools that are not associated with a particular religion or faith.

• **Pull-Out Program** - Children removed from the classroom for special instruction, usually given by another teacher, designed to meet their academic needs. Typically associated with special education or gifted classes.

• **Reward System** - Teachers encouraging good behavior using rewards.

• **School-based management** - Controlling school administrative decisions by school's principal, teachers and parents.

• **Self-Actualizer** - Child-centered, with the teacher as facilitator, to bring out the unique qualities, potentials and capacities of each child. Self-directed learning, individualized instruction and multi-sensory instruction, developmentally appropriate curriculum, whole language and creativity. Evaluation based on continuous progress and increase in autonomy of the learner.

• **Social Reconstructionists** - Viewing the learner as a social being, a member of a larger whole, who is expected to be a responsible citizen who contributes to resolving the problems of society. Simulations, role playing, values awareness with evaluation based on observation and demonstration of social concern, cooperation and empathy.

• **Standards-based education** - See **Outcomes-based education**

• **Structured Discipline** - High accountability and control of students.

• **Student-Driven Discipline** - Students establish their own rules/consequences.

• **Switching** - Teachers exchange students for specific subject areas.

• **Team-Teaching** - Two or more teachers designing student instruction.

• **Technologist** - Diagnosis of learner's needs and abilities with instructional strategies to develop skills and competencies. Evaluation through pre and post testing/gain scores.

• **Whole-language instruction** - Learning to read and write by grasping whole words and phrases rather than by sounding out letters or syllables.

• **Whole-math instruction** - Reasoning through numerical problems rather than relying on rote and/or memorization to solve problems.

• **Worksheets** - Written work related to the learning objective.

• **Year-round Schools** - Schools open throughout the year with short breaks between quarters with shorter summer vacation.

Templates

(reproducibles)

HOMEWORK SURVIVAL KIT
REQUEST FOR SUPPLIES

Check supplies needed:

☐ pencils	☐ pencil sharpener	☐ glue stick	☐ tape
☐ thesaurus	☐ stapler	☐ scissors	☐ paper clips
☐ dictionary	☐ construction paper	☐ writing paper	☐ eraser
☐ colored pencils	☐ markers	☐ atlas	☐ crayons

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☐ colored pencils	☐ markers	☐ atlas	☐ crayons

Weekly Schedule

TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY

Family Meeting Agenda

FAMILY MEETING AGENDA

Week of _____

WHAT	WHO	TIME ALLOTTED
• Family recognition/gratitude		
• Review of weekly schedule		
• Problem-solving		
•		
•		
• Free family fun activity(ies) this week:		
• Costly family fun activity(ies) for this week:		
• Round Robin Compliments and Closure		

Reference/Parenting

Parents - Read this guide before embarking on the "Education Journey" with your child.

Find the best tools, tips and strategies for making sure your child receives the education he/she deserves to succeed as an adult.

See how important it is to:

- Organize your home.
- Learn the "lingo" of the schools.
- Find the right learning environment for your child.
- Communicate with your child's teachers and staff members.
- Support your child's schooling through your efforts at home and at school.
- Help make learning fun, exciting and productive.

This book is a must for all parents with school-aged children!

Mary Wolf and Roni Reichardt began working together in 1996 to empower parents with the same basic knowledge about children and education that educators have. Check out their website at www.pepconsultants.com for more information about their workshops, services and publications.

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